★ "SOMEONE SENT CIGARS" BY KEM BENNETT

ARGOSY

JULY, 1954
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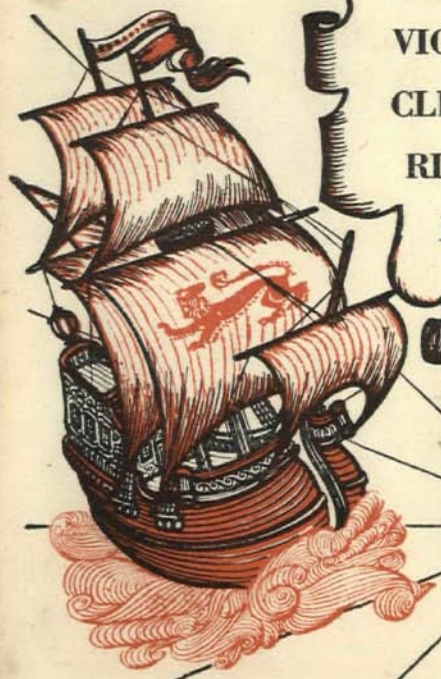

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ARGOSY

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Summer Evening

WHO can tell me the colour of the cut hay
In the small meadows at the ending of the day,
When the sun strokes it with long, golden hand,
And breathless, quiet as angels, the trees stand
Rooted in shadow, while the last rooks fly
Lazily homeward under the painted sky?
I know all the magic of the rainbow's hues
And the bright spectrum in the morning dews,
But here in the stillness of the summer weather
The very Phoenix seems to shed its feathers.

R. S. THOMAS,
The Stones of the Field

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MR. HEDDERWICK'S HOLIDAY

As he sloshed across the meadow her mocking laughter followed him

by LESLIE BONNET

IT was a very pert morning. The bright bravery of apple blossom enlivened the garden orchards of the happy village of Lashings Episcopi. Thrushes fluted in the gay sunshine. From clustering fields came the mellow mockery of the cuckoo.

The spring of 1864 was a very clement one; but this Wednesday morning was a part of one of the brightest of its genial days. To Ephraim Hedderwick the sights and sounds of the merry season did not at the moment greatly appeal. He hung by his hands from the iron frame of the inn sign that projected from the inn wall of The Load of Hay. The heavy painted board above him moved gently in the light airs. As it did so it scraped his knuckles. Below him the kidney stones of the inn forecourt waited, hard and uneven—ten feet below.

Mr. Hedderwick, on holiday, was a conspicuous object, even when conventionally occupied. Dundreary whiskers set off a round flat face, amply provisioned with so many deep creases that he could assume expressions of approval, arrogance, dismay, or disgust with mechanical ease. His attire while he hung, disconsolate, was unsuitable. A very capacious red dressing-gown, hauled up round his neck by his unusual posture so that his black whiskers stood out horizontally, gave him some protection against censorious comment. This protection was completed by the ample folds of a grey flannel nightshirt which flapped around his now naked feet. The tassel of a long woollen nightcap gave his distressed face an inappropriate aspect of daredevilry.

Ephraim was less distressed by the perils of his position than by its lack of dignity. This was almost the last situation in which he would have wished to be accosted by his office colleague, Claude Minty. Mr. Minty was at this moment standing in the primrose sunshine looking up at Ephraim with heavy concern. "I say, you old muff, what on earth are you both doing up there?" Mr. Hedderwick could not answer. *Both* of us, he thought, and looked despairingly about him.

At the open first-floor window just below him the full figure and flushed face of Agatha, the maid of the inn, who had clearly

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not yet finished putting on her clothes again, looked out with scorn at Mr. Hedderwick and with immodest approval upon the dapper figure of Claude Minty.

Ephraim shut his eyes, sweating. He heard his friend's worldly guffaw. " I shall get a ladder," Minty called.

The inn sign creaked and gave Ephraim's knuckles another knock. He began to wish that he was back at the Bank Stock Office in the Bank of England.

He had come to Lashings Episcopi for two weeks' leave on Claude Minty's recommendation. They had sat, he remembered, facing one another at opposite desks in the A—F section in the old rotunda. It was after three o'clock in the afternoon. The stockbrokers had finished making their transfers of stock. The office was hushed in the close privacy of the concluding hours of the day. Both were inscribing the names and addresses of new stockholders in beautiful and languid copperplate in great ledgers.

" It's such a jolly village," Minty had told him. " Just the place for you, old fellow. Fishing, quiet, friendliness. You'll be as right as a trivet there."

It must be admitted in fairness that Mr. Minty's description of Lashings Episcopi was a just one. It was indeed a jolly village. In a world where conventions were strict and extensive, at this time and in this little place a haven of tolerance, and those things that tolerance was created for, had by some happy chance come to exist. Lashings Episcopi was not a wicked place. Its few inhabitants were sinners, of course, as are we all. But their sins were all of the more genial kind, and the remorse that dutifully followed their commission was of a genial kind too.

Mr. Hedderwick noticed an air of friendliness as soon as the solitary porter had unlocked the door of his railway compartment at Lashings Episcopi station. " Just the place for you, sir, if I may say so respectful, sir," he had announced as he collected Mr. Hedderwick's ticket. " They expect you at The Load of Hay Inn. No, no need of a carriage, sir. Just down the lane. I'll bring the luggage up myself when I've locked up, for I've done for the day."

Where the deep lane debouched into the one street of the village Ephraim saw the inn, with the bold sign of a hay wain loaded high hanging from its red brick wall. At the open door, in the afternoon glow, a small knot of men was gathered.

Ephraim felt himself regarded as he approached; but though, like many middle-aged gentlemen of set habits, he was nervous in strange surroundings, he gave no sign of perturbation, but strutted manfully forward in the warming sunshine, stroking his side whiskers and frowning importantly. He was a striking

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figure in his holiday rig. A loose-cut red-and-green tartan jacket with big, flat gold buttons opened to reveal a waistcoat of jaunty workmanship. The tight trousers were of heavy mustard-yellow worsted. His plaid deerstalker sported a small feather.

As he neared the front step of the inn, a tall haggard person with an obsequious stoop detached himself from the group of gazing yokels. "Good day, sir. Mr. Hedderwick, I trust."

Mr. Hedderwick nodded, stern with shyness.

"Very welcome, sir. Zachariah Boddimeade at your service, sir." The curious onlookers parted. Mr. Hedderwick entered.

In the stone-flagged passage there was a welcome coolness and a pregnant fragrance of malted liquor. A buxom woman of some forty years came forward, with dimples, a timid smile, and a little curtsey. She wore a full-skirted dress of lavender linen. A clean yellow kerchief set off a notable bosom. Ephraim was savouring an impression of milk-and-rose complexion and meadow freshness when the innkeeper interrupted a silence that none but he had noticed by announcing, "Mrs. Boddimeade, my helpmeet, sir. Mrs. Boddimeade will supply your needs."

"And glad to do it, sir," said the mistress with a quick bob.

It was on a Monday that Mr. Hedderwick made this arrival at Lashings Episcopi. As it had happened his colleague was to share his vacation.

"I'll be able to show you round a bit, old fellow," Minty had said. "Shan't come down till the Wednesday myself. Must visit the great-aunt at Chelmsford first. Getting a bit shaky. You know what it is, old boy. But I'll travel early. Be down on Wednesday morning, first thing."

Ephraim, thumbs in his waistcoat, took a stroll around the small village. He was warmly touched by the friendliness of those he met. There was a frank interest in the salutations of the men, an engaging quickness in the glances of the young women. For once, Ephraim felt, Minty was indeed as good as his word.

Emboldened by this kind reception he ventured into the bar of The Load of Hay as the evening light faded. The landlord, Zachariah, stooping under the arch of the bar, took his order, and came back from the barrel with a pint of dark ale.

"I expect a little quiet is welcome to you, sir. Mr. Minty was down here two week back. He was a-telling us that it was quiet and rest you would want."

"Nice of him," commented Mr. Hedderwick, pursing his lips.

He sat for perhaps two hours in the bar, where the yellow light of tallow dips danced on the honey-brown ceiling. The company was very sociable. "We be all friends here," they kept on assuring him. Ephraim went to bed fuddled and flattered.

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At eight o'clock next morning, as the church clock across the green was striking five, a knock at Ephraim's bedroom door and a soft voice announcing, "Tea, sir. It's Agatha with your tea, sir," awoke him. As he roused himself he saw through the low, creeper-framed window the inn sign glistening with dew in the glad beams of the sun. It was a fine brisk morning. A pretty, forward-looking wench came into the room bearing tea on a neat tray. Mr. Hedderwick raised his whiskered face from his pillow, slight qualms from last evening making him squint.

"A lovely morning, sir," said Agatha who, now that Mr. Hedderwick had his eyes wide open, did not look quite so fresh as she had at first appeared. True, she had the ample figure which, as Mr. Hedderwick had already noted, seemed prevalent in Lashings Episcopi; but there was that look of awareness, almost of cynicism, about her.

Mr. Hedderwick greeted her graciously, sipped his tea, and waited for her to be gone. But the foolish creature seemed inclined to linger. The clear song of birds sounded in the eaves. The crunch of horses' hoofs floated in from the street. A bright, darting reflection from the horse trough in front of the inn played on the white ceiling. The maid loitered by the half-open door.

Mr. Hedderwick lost patience. "I'll give you a florin, young woman," he said, "if you will leave me alone to enjoy my tea."

But the maid, with an excited "Oh sir!" had fled, slamming the door, before she had listened to even half the sentence.

"Mad!" said Ephraim, and scratched an ear reflectively.

However, he did not let this silly incident disturb him. He arose with that luxurious feeling of freedom from time's nagging that holidays bestow, and enjoyed in the pretty back parlour a large breakfast of ham and eggs. Mrs. Boddimeade waited upon him, slipping in and out of the room with quiet alacrity. Ephraim thought she looked trim, devilish trim.

When he went to close the door which she had left open while she was clearing the table, she said, "Please to leave it open, sir. I'll be done in a minute."

"Humph!" said Mr. Hedderwick, and then chided himself for ill-humour. No doubt Mrs. Boddimeade wanted to hear if anyone came into the bar.

At length he was alone and free to light his cigar. Then, legs straddled, a coat lap under each arm, with his back to the unnecessary comfort of a coal fire, Ephraim considered how to employ the day. Fishing, he at last decided, with a nod to the rose-decorated wallpaper; and, going to the door, called grandly for the landlord to give him directions.

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The morning was mellowing towards noon when Ephraim came to where the stream sparkled under willow and alder. Impatiently he assembled his rod and tied his brightest fly. Then from a clear stretch of bank he began to flog the water with the earnest ferocity of the beginner. He moved slowly along the water's edge, making ineffectual casts. His face was grim; sweat began to sting his eyes; his arm ached. He was thoroughly enjoying himself. Suddenly a lady's voice arrested him.

"A good morning to you, sir."

He looked round quickly. A gentlewoman was watching him with an amused smile. She was tall, and stood with indolent grace, the cluster of pink roses on her spoon bonnet nodding with her in merriment. The tight bodice of her green costume flowed into a full skirt. Over both arms hung the ends of a fine woven scarf. Her spaniel was rummaging in his fishing-basket.

"Here, Springer!" said the lady to the dog, which ignored the summons.

"Good morning, ma'am," said Mr. Hedderwick, his face fixed in a ferocious scowl of embarrassment.

"I trust you do not mind being watched," said the lady.

"On the contrary, on the contrary," muttered Mr. Hedderwick who, having found his hook firmly stuck into an inconvenient bush, flung his rod on the sward and began to mop his brow.

"Let me introduce myself," said the lady, moving nearer. "I'm Mrs. Paradise, from the Hall. You must surely be Mr. Hedderwick."

"At your service, ma'am," blurted Mr. Hedderwick, very flattered at her knowledge of him. "I trust you are well, and "—with a note of interrogation—"Mr. Paradise too, ma'am?"

"Oh, he's well enough, I think," said Mrs. Paradise, tapping the ground with a trim foot. "But too old for walking in the mornings, Mr. Hedderwick, you understand."

"Ah, so," said Mr. Hedderwick, not understanding anything.

"You must think me very forward in seeking your acquaintance in this fashion," said Mrs. Paradise, lowering her eyes, "But I positively had to meet with you, sir."

Ephraim unobtrusively moved back a step. There was a wild perfume in his nostrils and the pale oval face had been very close. "I'm most honoured, I'm sure," he said, completely perplexed.

Mrs. Paradise turned dark eyes full upon him. "I too will give up everything for love," she said in a strange voice. She dropped her dainty parasol upon the grass and flung aside the filmy scarf. "How oddly warm it is," she murmured, and Ephraim saw a disturbing flush spread across her cheeks.

Ephraim was alarmed as well as upset. He retreated another

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step, tripped over his rod, and fell flat on his broad back into the water. There was a remarkable splash, a quick scream from Mrs. Paradise, and after a moment's floundering Ephraim found himself standing up to his waist in chilly water. He should have realized that he was now in a situation to discuss matters with proper composure; but presence of mind had deserted him.

Unaware that he was now safe, and heedless of dignity, he plunged away across the stream and scrambled, soggy, up the opposite bank. He did not turn to take his leave of Mrs. Paradise. As he sloshed away across the meadow, the mockery of her disappointed laughter followed him. "Lost a fine rod, ruined my morning! What on earth was the matter with her?" he grumbled to himself as he dragged heavily back to The Load of Hay.

Mr. Hedderwick will be pardoned for retiring to bed that afternoon. His clothes had to be dried and he was, besides, very put out by the events of the morning. However, Mrs. Boddimeade had been most solicitous and soothing, and as he lay lazily under crisp sheets and watched the shadows lengthening across the street, peace of mind stealthily returned.

After a comfortable tea Ephraim began to think of getting up again, and while he thought of it, he fell asleep. So it was that at about eight in the evening he dragged on the voluminous dressing-gown, and groped his way downstairs in search of his clothes. He found the hall in darkness. He fumbled his way down the passage, past the dining parlour, and knocked at a door at the end where chinks of light were gleaming.

There was no answer. With a grunt of annoyance Ephraim turned the handle and went in. He found himself in a large kitchen. Mrs. Boddimeade sat by an open fire gazing fixedly at the doorway. She looked, in truth, very enjoyable. But Ephraim was too vexed with darkness and indecision to notice such a thing.

"Oh, there you are," said he, relieved.

"Yes, here I am," replied the landlady with unnecessary dramatic emphasis.

"Where is everybody?" asked Ephraim, not caring where they were.

"It's band-practice night over at Pendelton," she said. "Everybody goes, every man in the village."

"Ah," said Ephraim.

"Ah," said Mrs. Boddimeade.

Mr. Hedderwick thought this rather rude. "Well, why not?" he asked tartly.

"I thought you would come to that," said Mrs. Boddimeade. "Well, no one can say he wasn't warned. And, as I always say myself, what has to be will be!"

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While she was thus speaking, an expression of resignation had appeared on her face where it competed with evidences of soft confusion; and when she had concluded, she stood upright in the fire glow and hid her blushes in her skirts. Mr. Hedderwick was appalled at the sight, and horrified at this mad act.

He gave a snort of disgust which may well have sounded like a grunt of passion to the now muffled ears of Mrs. Boddimeade. Then, abandoning all hope of his clothes, he went from the room hastily, but with stealth lest he be dragged back again, so that Mrs. Boddimeade stood blind and defenceless before the fire for quite a while before she discovered that she was not beset.

Who can describe the feelings of Mr. Hedderwick as he tossed sleepless in his bed that night? The startling sights and occurrences of the day crowded upon his mind. He gritted his teeth and used profane language at the thought of his humiliations. He would leave Lashings Episcopi on the instant. He would call out the landlord. He would consult his solicitor . . . Before he had decided anything, fevered sleep had seized him.

It was light when he awoke. A tap on the door aroused him. He groaned, as one groans who wakes to trouble. "All that," he thought, "and now this talkative girl."

Then an idea came to him. "Wait!" he shouted, and jumping out of bed, enveloped himself beyond all suspicion of indecorum in his dressing-gown. A talkative girl was exactly what he needed. He would discover what all these incidents meant.

So, "Come in," he said, and as the presentable maid hurried into the room, he stepped before the door and closed it behind her.

She turned round quickly and tea spilled over the cup.

"There's something I want to ask you," said Mr. Hedderwick.

"Of course, sir. Just as you wish. You must work your wicked will, no doubt." And, with this strange utterance, the stupid girl began quickly and expertly, to disrobe.

Mr. Hedderwick nearly lost his reason. "No! No!" he implored. "I shan't be but a minute, sir," said Agatha through her chemise.

Mr. Hedderwick saw that remonstrances were vain. His eyes darted here and there. He dared not go downstairs and perhaps face Mrs. Boddimeade again, in his dressing-gown. The window was open. He darted to it. The drop was too great. He saw the signboard swinging gently above him. With the heroism of despair he scrambled out onto the window-sill, launched himself for one terrifying moment into the air, and by merciful providence succeeded in grasping the lower frame of the sign.

He hung, breathless, frightened; but inviolate. Surely no one would interfere with him there.

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It was in this predicament that Claude Minty discovered him.

When he had been rescued, Minty was greatly distressed at the shaken condition of his friend and colleague. With soothing words he restored Ephraim's clothing, with tactful conversation he induced him to breakfast, and then, when cigars had been lit, suggested a walk and a talk.

They went off alone in the brittle sunshine. Ephraim laid bare his tale. He implored Claude to furnish some explanation.

Claude looked remarkably hangdog, as one might if one's joke has gone too far. With a hand on Ephraim's shoulder, he confessed. "Well, as a matter of fact, old fellow, I'm deuced sorry now. But I did drop a word here, two weeks back, that you were an old friend of mine. I—well, I did suggest that you were . . . an unfrocked priest."

Ephraim stopped.

"An unfrocked priest?" His voice was incredulous.

Claude nodded miserably. "I know it's unpardonable, old man. Can't think what made me do it."

Ephraim clutched both his arms. "What was I unfrocked for, pray?"

The miscreant could not meet his eye. "For scandalous conduct," he muttered. "You know," he went on as Ephraim did not seem to comprehend, "loose living and all that sort of thing. I know it sounds shameful; but I thought it would, in a way, establish you in this place, don't you know?"

"Monstrous!" was all that Ephraim could say. But he had contorted his creased face to express rage, disgust, and lifelong enmity all at the same time.

The walk was resumed in gloom.

But it was such a pert spring morning. "Love," chirped the chaffinches. "Love," glowed the apple-blossom. "Love," laughed the little brooks.

As they came near The Load of Hay again through the sweet air, Ephraim stopped once more, squeezing Claude Minty's arm quite warmly. "Don't you think, old chap," he said, "that it would only cause confusion to contradict that story?"

He had quite a jaunty look now. His eye went up reminiscently to his bedroom window.

"Shouldn't wonder if Mrs. Paradise doesn't call to return my rod," he mused.

★ ★ ★

Wagner has beautiful moments, but awful quarter-hours.

GIOACHINO ROSSINI

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★ *Argosy readers may remember the likeable young couple, Philippa and Tim McCoy, with their redoubtable cat, Joe—that magnificent trans-Atlantic specimen of the feline race. Here he comes stub tail high and whiskers twitching! Meet Joe now on this American train—if you have not already had the pleasure of being introduced to him.*

LOVE ME, LOVE MY CAT

by RICHARD STERN

PHILIPPA McCOY was combing her hair in front of the compartment mirror.

"G. F.," she said, "is a character."

The train wheels clicked monotonously.

"Tim! Did you hear me?"

"I heard." He grinned at her.

He was sitting by the window. Joe, the McCoy cat, was crouched on the seat beside him, working his great forepaws in a dance of ecstasy beneath Tim's digging fingers. Joe's purr throbbed and rumbled deep in his chest.

"On the other hand," Tim said, "G.F. owns a few little things like manufacturing plants and a string of subsidiary concerns and an advertising budget that stretches from here to there."

He rolled the size of the advertising budget around in his mind. "And if he decides he likes me—us—he can make life very pleasant."

He studied Philippa. "I like your hair that way."

"And he's rather sweet, too," Philippa said, "but he's still a character. I haven't changed it; not much, anyway." She smiled into the mirror. "If you see what I mean."

Tim nodded gravely. "More or less." He watched her put down the comb and make the final, essential adjustments with her fingers.

He stood up. "Here we go." He looked down at Joe. "Wish us luck."

Joe said nothing.

Philippa said, "You're not going to leave him out of his basket? The man said that whenever we left the compartment—" She looked down at Joe.

His purr had stopped; he regarded her thoughtfully. "Well," Philippa said, "I wouldn't like to be shut up in a box, either."

"We'll lock the door," Tim said. "And he has no key."

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"Tim, I'm not sure. If he got loose in the train—Maybe if we left him some rum—"

"Later," Tim said.

He kissed her briefly. He had the door open now.

"Let's not keep our character waiting."

Philippa was smiling. "G. F.," she said. "Why does he have to use initials?"

"How else would you know he's an executive?" Tim said. He closed the door.

"I hadn't thought of that," said Philippa . . .

Joe watched the door close. He heard the latch click. He yawned. He stretched himself fore and aft. He settled down on the seat again, his chin on his forepaws, his eyes half closed. He waited, dozing.

It was already late afternoon. Presently there would be rum, which he loved—dark rum added to warm milk. This was routine, and despite the new surroundings he saw no reason for change.

G. F. was in the lounge, one car back. He was a large man wearing a high stiff collar and what Philippa had once heard called the habit of command. He exercised the habit now.

"Sit down, Mrs. McCoy. No, not there, here." He indicated the seat at his side. He pointed out a chair for Tim. He raised his finger, and a waiter popped up through the floor.

"You're comfortable, I hope?" he said.

"Fine, thanks," Tim said.

"Good." He told the waiter what to fetch. He smiled at Philippa. "We won't talk business, Mrs. McCoy."

"I don't mind," Philippa said. She was thinking again of Joe.

"No." G. F. was definite. "I have curious old-fashioned ideas, as your husband may have told you. I want to *know* the people I am thinking of working with, know what their personalities are, how they behave, how they think."

"I see," Philippa said. She wondered if she did.

G. F. nodded. "That was why I asked you to come to the ranch, so we could get acquainted." He paused. "That was also why I suggested that you bring your cat."

"I—I've been wondering about that," Philippa said.

G. F. smiled. "Another of my theories, Mrs. McCoy. I believe that children and pets are great revealers of character. A spoilt child, a spoilt dog—you see what I mean, perhaps?"

Tim's foot was touching hers.

"I—I think I do," Philippa said.

"Exactly." G. F. nodded.

He watched the waiter set down the drinks. He picked up his

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glass. "I don't know about cats. I'm a dog man myself. I have one in the guard's van, a new watchdog for the ranch. You saw him, McCoy?"

"I did indeed," Tim said.

He thought of the dog glowering in his crate. He thought of Joe. "He seemed a little—er—savage."

"Forthright," G. F. said. "Dogs don't sneak." He raised his glass. "I don't know about cats. I'll be interested to see." Philippa coughed. Tim's foot pressed hers warningly.

"Drink up, you young people," G. F. said.

The watchdog, whose name was Attila, looked out through the slats of the crate, in the front van. He watched the guard and he watched the two brightly coloured birds in the large cage across the van; they sat on their trapeze, side by side, talking incessantly to each other. Attila stirred uneasily.

The guard watched the dog. The guard disliked animals; he liked boxes and crates and trunks, things that behaved the way he wanted them to. He wished that the birds would shut up.

He wished that the dog were not there. He was a mean-looking brute, that dog, the guard thought; and that crate looked none too sturdy. It would bear watching. He wished that the dog would bark. Barking dogs, he had heard, rarely bite.

"Bark, damn you," he said. And then, to the birds: "And you shut up." The birds chattered on.

Attila lifted his upper lip but made no sound.

In the compartment, Joe opened his eyes. He listened to the gentle knock at the door. He waited. It was time, and past, for the rum and the warm milk. He thrust out his tongue and licked his nose in pleasant anticipation. His whiskers curled briskly. The knock was repeated, and then there was silence.

Joe waited. He watched the latch turn, watched the door open. He saw the strange man in the white coat. He sniffed and stood up, and his stub tail rose like a flag. He spoke once in a peremptory fashion. He dropped to the floor and advanced and spoke again, requesting his due.

The white coat began to shake. "Go on, get away," the attendant said. "Don't you come near me."

He flapped both hands in a gesture of repudiation. "Get away." His voice rose.

Joe stopped where he was. The tone of voice was plainly unfriendly. Joe's whiskers laid themselves flat against his cheeks. His big head lowered. The muscles of his shoulders bunched. Deep in his chest a rumbling growl began, like summer thunder high in the mountains.

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The stub tail twitched. He moved forward.

It was too much. The attendant turned and fled in search of reinforcements . . .

G. F. was saying, " It is the man himself who counts, not necessarily his abilities, although those too, of course, are important." He paused. " You follow me, McCoy? I think of my organization as a family, and I like to think that each new member, as it were, will reflect credit on the family as a whole. You can appreciate that, of course."

" Of course," Tim said. He avoided Philippa's eyes.

" Brothers and sisters," Philippa said. She was frowning in concentration, trying hard to help.

G. F. nodded. " Exactly."

He smiled. " And I flatter myself that I am a sound judge of character, Mrs. McCoy. I try not to be hasty in my decisions, but there are times when the facts speak out immediately. You and your husband, I believe I can safely say, are precisely the type of people I like to have associated with me."

" Well," Tim said, " we're flattered, G. F."

The old boy *was* a character, he was thinking—high collar, strange ideas and all. But he would be a good man to work with; no nonsense, no beating about the bush. Tim felt a small glow of satisfaction, and he rolled around in his mind again the size of the advertising appropriation he would have to work with.

" I'm delighted, of course, that—" He stopped there, seeing Philippa's face, which was set and staring.

G. F. saw it too. " Something wrong, Mrs. McCoy? "

" No," Philippa said. " I mean, yes."

She was looking accusingly at Tim. " You—you said Joe had no key, and—and there he is."

There he was indeed, marching purposefully down the aisle, his stub tail high, his whiskers twitching pleasurably.

Passengers moving to and from the dining-car had kindly opened the necessary doors, and now here he was in front of the small bar; his nose worked in solemn investigation. He ignored the silence around him.

Here, obviously, was the source of the rum fragrance that had drifted into the next car each time the doors opened. He crouched and sprang effortlessly and landed, hind feet first, on the bar top.

He looked the bar-tender in the eye and gave his order in a firm clear voice.

Philippa said, " Oh, Tim! "

G. F. said nothing.

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Tim was already on his feet. He headed for Joe. He arrived in a dead heat with the attendant and the conductor, who came through the door almost at a run.

It was later, in the compartment again. Philippa said, " I won't say that I warned you."

Tim nodded. " Of course not."

Philippa sat down. " Brothers and sisters," she said, " reflecting credit on one another . . . Tim, I was trying so hard to help."

There was silence.

Philippa said, " Say something. Say anything."

He searched for a distraction, a false lure to drag across the path of the conversation.

" I still like your hair," he said.

" Tim! "

" Well," Tim said, " I hope he enjoys the luggage-van."

Joe was not enjoying the luggage-van. It had, for one thing, a peculiar odour compounded of generations of crates and trunks and oddments, and the odour offended him. Then, too, it was draughty and noisy, and his basket provided little room for movement. Added to all this, there was the ignominy of incarceration.

Joe crouched and stared through the wire mesh of his window. He watched the guard. He said nothing. He watched the dog, Attila, whose nose was quivering and whose hackles were up. He glanced once at the birds, strangely silent now, huddled against each other, their heads pulled down into their shoulders. Joe disliked birds; they were, by and large, noisy, unpredictable, and covered with feathers.

He concentrated on the dog. Dogs he understood.

The guard watched them both. There was, he decided, not much to choose between them. The dog, of course, was the larger, the more patently vicious. On the other hand, a cat like this one—the guard had never seen a cat the size of this one! It occurred to him that he had been most content in his ignorance.

He thought of the next scheduled stop, which would be—he consulted his watch—in two hours and forty-three minutes. In the meantime, he was on his own, and he believed in preparedness. He began to shuffle crates and boxes. Neither Joe nor Attila paid any attention to him.

It was Attila who opened the festivities. He lifted his lips and flattened his ears. He made a small lunge. His crate shook. He snarled, flinging his defiance across the car.

The birds pulled their heads down even farther, making themselves into small, brightly coloured feather balls.

The guard speeded up his shuffling.

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Joe listened to the snarl with the air of a connoisseur. He had heard better, much better. He yawned, showing long cat teeth. He lifted one large forepaw and flexed it, and the five hooked knives slid in and out of their sheaths. He regarded the dog almost with indifference, and then, lest his attitude be misunderstood, he allowed a growl to form deep in his chest, a sound blending defiance and contempt in almost equal parts. And he yawned again, and that, like the pulling of a trigger, really did it.

Attila's snarl was no longer tentative. It was full-throated and filled with vigour. He lunged against the side of the crate, slamming into it with his shoulder, rocking it on its base, bulging its slats. He paused to watch. Joe appeared unimpressed.

Attila set to work . . .

Tim and Philippa headed for the dining-car. " We'll just pretend that nothing happened," Tim said.

" Of course," Philippa said. " Cats come into the buffet cars of trains and order drinks every day. G. F. must know that."

Tim paused to wrestle with a door-handle.

" Damn it," he said, " it was his idea, not mine, that we should bring Joe in the first place."

" Your logic—" Philippa said, and she left it there, unfinished.

" All right," Tim said. Then suddenly, unaccountably, he began to smile. " It does, doesn't it? Sound like yours, I mean."

They were in the corridor now, standing in front of the dining-car door. Tim's smile began to fade. " I guess I'm just worried. It—it means so damn much to make a good impression on him."

" I know," Philippa said.

She took a deep breath. " It'll be all right. I know it will."

" I hope so," Tim said, and he opened the door.

G. F. was already seated at a table for four. He rose and made a small courtly bow to Philippa. He nodded to Tim and sat down again. The silence was heavy.

" I'm sorry about Joe," Tim said. " It was my fault. I thought he'd be all right in the compartment, but the attendant opened the door."

" Yes," G. F. said.

" He only wanted his rum," Philippa said.

G. F.'s eyebrows rose.

" I mean," Philippa said, " he has it every day. He—he likes it, but usually in warm milk."

G. F. nodded. His eyes seemed to be focused in the far distance. Tim grasped the conversation firmly. His manner was that of a man explaining the obvious. " It's strange, too, because some cats don't like milk."

" Indeed? "

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Philippa backed Tim up: "And some don't even care for liver."

Tim nodded. "So you see," he said, "Joe is—"

"What would you like for dinner?" G. F. said.

The time had come, the guard decided, to bolster his defences. He grabbed a large carton and pushed it against the side of the crate that seemed to be suffering most from Attila's lunges. He leaned against the end of the carton, holding it firmly in position. He got out his watch. The crate had held up longer than he had anticipated. There remained now only one hour and fifty-seven minutes until the next stop.

He looked longingly at the communication cord. The temptation was strong, but habit was stronger; communication cords were to be pulled only in dire emergencies; there were regulations concerning this. He leaned hard against the end of the case. He looked at the birds, whose heads by now had almost disappeared into their feathers. "You started it all with your damn chatter."

He looked at Joe, who was peering in an interested fashion through the mesh of his basket. "And you! You had to make him mad."

Joe said nothing. His whiskers twitched pleasurably.

The guard listened to Attila's snarls, which were quieter now, more determined, subordinated to the effort of banging and chewing his way to freedom. "Fifteen years to retirement age," the guard said . . .

When G. F. had finished his salad, he put down his fork and peered out of the window at the darkened countryside. He leaned back in his chair.

"Do you have any other—er—pets, Mrs. McCoy?"

Philippa nodded brightly.

"Yes. A monkey. His name is Vincent."

G. F.'s expression was that of a man incapable of further astonishment. "And he and the cat—"

"They're great friends," Tim said. "They get on beautifully."

Philippa said, "They drink out of the same bowl."

"Rum," G. F. said.

There was silence.

"Vincent was a gift," Tim said. "He just arrived one day."

"My Aunt," Philippa said. "Aunt Lucy." She paused, searching for words to explain Aunt Lucy. "She's a dear old lady. She has—er—strange ideas sometimes. She used to raise pekinese. And then she studied occultism, and—well, she thought we'd like a monkey. That was all."

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G. F. said, "Your actual aunt, Mrs. McCoy? Not just a relation by marriage?"

"She was my Mother's oldest sister," Philippa said.

Tim looked down at his hands. He said nothing.

"And you have a son, I understand," G. F. said.

Tim looked up. "Yes." His voice had altered. It was still respectful, but its tone was firm. "His name is Thomas. And he has only one head, if that's what you mean, G. F."

Philippa said, "I think I'd like some coffee . . ."

The air in the car was chilly, but the guard was sweating. He leaned hard with one knee against the first carton and, stretching, managed to reach another, and pull it towards him. Joe watched with deep interest.

The sounds of Attila's rage were somewhat muffled, now emerging through multiple layers of fibre-board and shavings and broken wood. He had gone through the side of his own crate. He had struck this new barrier. He had hesitated for a moment, and the guard had breathed deeply, like a man coming into sunlight at the end of a long dark tunnel.

It was then that Joe, adding colour to the proceedings, had opened his mouth and made his first real statement, a sound unlike anything the guard had heard before, a wailing, high-pitched yowl of defiance, a clarion call to battle.

The effect was instantaneous and remarkable.

Attila hesitated no longer. He lunged and tore, fighting his way onward through the side of the carton, and Joe, listening, uttered yet a third sound, a small chirrup of glee.

"Shut up, damn you," the guard said, and his voice climbed in near hysteria.

One of the birds lifted his head. He made a single noise, a small frightened peep.

"And you too!" the guard shouted.

The bird's head disappeared.

The guard slammed the second carton into position. He leaned hard against it and pulled another one close. He shut his eyes, and his lips moved silently . . .

At the table for four, the atmosphere was a trifle strained. G. F. dabbed at his mouth with his napkin. He looked at Tim. He spoke in the voice he used to unruly boards of directors. "I am not quite sure that I understand you, McCoy."

"I think—" Tim began.

Philippa said, "I don't believe I want any coffee, after all." She looked quickly at her watch. "Heavens! I hadn't realized it was so late. We're due in in twenty minutes, and—"

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"Perhaps I was wrong in my judgment," G. F. said. "It is beginning to appear—"

"You? Wrong?" Tim said.

G. F.'s eyebrows lowered in a straight line. "A man who keeps a cat and a monkey—"

"I do really think we should get ready," Philippa said. She touched Tim's arm. "It *is* late. And you're finished, aren't you?"

Tim looked at G. F. Slowly he nodded. "Yes," he said, "I guess I am." He looked at Philippa. She was unsmiling, but her eyes were bright and her chin was firm. She put her hand on Tim's arm; it rested there lightly, reassuringly. She looked at G. F., and her head was high. "You'll excuse us, won't you?"

G. F. nodded. "A pleasure."

"All right," the guard said. He spoke aloud for the gods to hear and bear witness that he had done his utmost. The cartons—there were now four of them, hollow, gutted shells—extended in a straight line across the car, forming a tunnel from Attila's original crate; and within the tunnel the dog, goaded to a new pitch of fury by each successive barrier, raged and tore at the final flimsy wall.

Sweat was running in small streams down the sides of the guard's nose; the palms of his hands were wet. He was conscious that the train was stopping. He was also conscious, painfully conscious, that the final wall of the final carton was not going to hold out; already it was bulging against his leg. He looked around him for new barricade material.

In their cage, the birds maintained a loud, self-effacing silence. The guard's eyes passed them by. There remained within reach only Joe's basket, and the guard looked at it longingly; and Joe, peering through the wire mesh, looked hopefully at the guard. Neither spoke.

The train stopped and there were only the sounds of Attila, tearing at the final wall and announcing clearly the things he intended to accomplish when he emerged.

The tension was too much for the guard.

"It's your fault," he said to Joe. His voice was high and tight and the words were difficult to pronounce. "If you hadn't made him mad with your squalling—"

Joe spoke briefly and with contempt. And then he opened his mouth wide, and his yowl rang clearly through the car and along the silent train.

"Well, O.K.," the guard said. "You asked for it." The words were easier now; his conscience was suddenly at rest.

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He reached out and caught the corner of the carrier, pulled it close, unhooked the two latches, and folded the side back. He caught one glimpse of Joe's face, whiskers curled briskly, before he pushed the open side of the carrier against the carton wall.

There was a tearing sound, and one of Attila's paws broke through, folding a portion of the wall back, pushing the carrier a few inches away. Attila's nose followed, plastered with bits of shavings and torn fibre-board, but with purpose undimmed.

"There he is!" the guard shouted. "Say it again, right to his face!" And he jumped for the door into the corridor and flung it open.

Joe made no answer.

Joe was busy, at work he knew and understood and loved. Here before him was the dog's nose, the dog's lips lifted in a snarl—an opportunity not to be ignored. Joe set himself on three legs. With his right forepaw, he slashed three times; he changed paws to adjust to the slightly altered range and slashed four times more. And then with the enemy temporarily out of reach, he paused, his big head lowered and his whiskers laid flat, the muscles of his shoulders bunched ominously. He yowled his defiance into the tunnel mouth and launched his attack.

It was then that Tim, Philippa, G. F., and two conductors, attracted by the capering and shouting of the guard, arrived on the scene.

Attila was not through. He was more than a little bewildered, but some of his fury remained. He had only retreated to regroup his forces. He licked his nose and tasted his own blood. Clearly, something was amiss. Cats, in Attila's experience, were supposed to turn tail, to run, squalling, for the nearest tree—easy prey, pleasant sport. He snarled, working himself up to proper fighting pitch. He was still at it when the roof fell in.

The tunnel, not really large enough for proper manœuvring, seemed suddenly filled with cats. Attila retreated a few steps, seeking a suitable defensive position. But the cats followed, and there was no respite, and the retreat became a mad, backward scrambling, a rout, anything to escape this punishment. The sounds emerging from the tunnel were pitiable indeed. From their cage, the birds watched in silence.

Tim was the first one into the luggage-van. He disconnected the tunnel a box at a time. The strife had ended. Attila was back in his original crate, peering out through the broken slats at his adversary, who now, unaccountably, appeared to have lost all interest and sat calmly on the floor of the car, one forepaw raised, pink tongue working busily, pausing now and again to make a small chirruping sound of satisfaction. It was confusing.

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Tim said, " Well done, champ." He pitched his voice to carry clearly through the open door. He bent down and dug at Joe's shoulders, and the purr began, rumbling deep in Joe's big chest. " I guess you just hadn't heard that dogs are superior animals, that people who live with cats are supposed to be ashamed."

Joe paused in his washing. He looked up, catching the bitter note in Tim's voice. He spoke once, peremptorily, requesting elaboration.

" Well," Tim said, " it's a little hard to explain." He hoped that G. F. was listening. " Some people have ideas on behaviour. They expect that everybody else will conform right down to the ground." He looked at Attila, who was silent in his crate, licking his wounds, his eyes never leaving Joe. " Your friend over there had ideas, too. He's already revising his. Animals are clever that way; they're adaptable."

He stood up. He closed the basket and snapped it shut. He snapped his fingers. " Come on, champ."

One of the birds extended his head cautiously. He looked around. Nothing happened. He began to talk, tentatively at first, and then with growing confidence, explaining to his partner that the riot was over.

It was some time later, in the small bar across the street from the station. Tim and Philippa sat across from each other at a table. On a third chair Joe was crouched, lapping steadily at a bowl of warm milk and dark rum. The barman watched warily, keeping his distance.

It was there that G. F. found them.

He came in slowly. He nodded to the bar-tender, who bowed low. He walked over to the table and stood there for a moment in silence. Joe raised his head, looked up, then resumed his drinking.

" That's quite an animal," G. F. said.

It was Philippa who answered, and her voice carried the same blend of respect and firmness that had been in Tim's voice at dinner: " We like him."

" Er," G. F. said. The habit of command seemed to have slipped for the moment. " I shall have a fair bill for damages." He paused. " The bill could have been larger, much larger. If he'd got those birds—very valuable, I understand, although why anyone should want to have birds around is more than I—" He stopped there, as if he were remembering something. " Er, maybe it's just that I have never bothered to understand birds. They might be quite—er—friendly little rascals."

" They might," Tim said. " Somebody probably likes them."

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G. F. nodded slowly. "I—er—heard what you said in the luggage-van about theories." He looked down at Joe again. Joe raised his head. He said nothing.

"Sit down," Philippa said. "Join us."

"Maybe we could get acquainted," Tim said.

There was a sudden brightness in the old man's eyes. "Maybe we could." He sat down.

His eyes did not leave Joe.

"We're all having rum," Philippa said. "Will you have some?" She looked at him innocently.

The brightness became a sparkle. G. F. began to smile. It looked as if he might not have had much practice. "I don't mind if I do," he said.

Joe lowered his head solemnly. He sniffed at his brew. His tongue began to lap with a steady, friendly beat.

★ ★ ★

ON THE OFFENSIVE!

"I never insult people; why should they insult me?" wrote sensible Mr. Pooter in his "Diary of a Nobody;" but few other fictional characters have had such a logical outlook.

In this holocaust of withering insult and derogatory comment, score one point if you can identify the speaker, a second for the victim, and one each for the author and the source, making a possible total of thirty-two.

The answers are on page 107.

1. "*Take his skates off . . . You're a humbug, sir.*"
2. "*The devil damn thee black, thou cream-fac'd loon! Where gott'st thou that goose look?*"
3. "*Have we been captained all this time by a codfish?*"
4. "*She is a monster, without being a myth, which is rather unfair.*"
5. "*Hullo, washerwoman! Half a pair of socks and a pillow-case short this week! Mind it doesn't occur again!*"
6. "*Thou look'st like antichrist, in that lewd hat.*"
7. "*Grr—there go, my heart's abhorrence! Water your damned flower-pots, do!*"
8. "*I am only conscious of one hope, citoyen . . . That Satan, your master, will have need of you elsewhere before the sun rises today.*"

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WATCH YOUR STEP

If among four men there is a thief . . .

by VICTOR CANNING

FATHER ROSARIO and I came down the hill together towards the little port. It had rained during the night and the colours were fresh and vivid. The blue sea sparkled below us, the pink and white houses crowding round the square were bright in the sun, and behind us the tawny hills were studded with the jet shadows cast by the olive trees. To our right brawled the mountain stream, in spate from the rain which had been heavy in the hills. And it all looked the same as it had done eleven years before, when I had been in uniform and not on holiday, and the hills behind us had been full of Germans.

"We are glad to have you back, my son," said Father Rosario. "You will find little changed here, except that there is more to eat, and the men are all at home."

When I had known it last, food had been the big problem, and most of the men had been away in the hills, fighting as partisans.

"I've always wanted to come back, Father. Many times in the past years I've promised myself that one day I should be out there in the bay, fishing. And that I should see you again."

He gave a little nod of his head, a lean, black-robed figure at my side, and I wondered if he knew that it was he who had brought me back. He was a man for whom I had an immense respect, a man of great courage and greater wisdom . . . but beyond these he had something else, a warm humanity and a gentle understanding of men. He was old and he was thin, and he looked as though a wind would blow him away, a harsh word wither him, but I knew differently.

"We shall ask Giorgio about the fishing." He motioned with his hand towards a small cottage on the left. "He lives there, but at the moment he will be down with the boats. You will not remember Giorgio for he was away during your time here. His wife died just after the war and he now lives alone. He is a fine man, but a little intemperate."

Down below the cottage there was a row of stepping-stones across the stream. Father Rosario gathered up his robe and went across, and I followed, the water washing over the stones and almost into my shoes. We came to the first of the houses,

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went down a small alleyway whose walls were overgrown with bougainvillaea and, turning a corner, were in the square. It was quiet and peaceful and on the far side, beyond a low wall, lay the sea.

As we crossed to the wall, there floated up to us, from the sands below, the sound of men's voices raised in argument.

Father Rosario and I leaned over. Small fishing-boats were drawn up on the beach, and some children were bathing from the end of a ramshackle jetty. Below us, gathered about a pile of nets, were five men. Four of them squatted on the sand, working at the nets, and the fifth, a burly, blue-shirted figure, black-haired, his skin burnt a fine mahogany, stood beyond them, shouting angrily, making himself heard above the indignant voices of the others.

At the sight of Father Rosario, all the men were suddenly silent.

"What is it, Giorgio?" Father Rosario addressed himself to the standing man.

For a moment Giorgio looked embarrassed and then he mumbled, "It is nothing, Father."

Father Rosario smiled. "You make a great deal of noise over nothing, Giorgio."

We went down a small flight of stone steps to the sand and joined the men. Father Rosario introduced me. Then he turned to Giorgio. "What is the trouble, my son?"

When Giorgio made no answer a young man, wearing an old army battle-dress blouse, looked up at Giorgio and said angrily, "You accuse us, but you are afraid to speak in front of the good Father."

"And of what does Giorgio accuse you, Beppo?" asked Father Rosario.

"Not me alone, Father," answered Beppo, "but also Mario, Giuseppe, and Carlo." He nodded to the others. Mario was a young man, lean and pale-looking; Giuseppe was much older, fat and bald, with a sleepy grin on his face; and Carlo was a thickset, muscular man of nearly sixty with a greying moustache. They sat there, the four of them, cross-legged and barefooted, working at their nets.

"But of what are you accused?" Father Rosario asked gently.

"Of stealing my watch!" Giorgio suddenly exploded. "It is the gold watch, Father, with the fifteen rubies which I had from my father and he from his father and before that—"

"The good Father knows the watch. You wear it across your chest like a great sun every time you go to Mass," said Carlo.

"But no longer, for it is stolen and the thief sits here!"

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Father Rosario lowered himself to the gunwale of a boat and cocked his head at Giorgio. "I know the watch, Giorgio. It is very beautiful. But, my son, what makes you think the thief is one of your friends?"

"It is not a thing I say easily, Father. But the truth is the truth. Last night my four friends came to eat and drink at my house. We sat in the little garden and the watch was in the house, in the case on the shelf above my bed, where it always is, and during the evening each of my friends went into the house for one reason and another. The whole evening there was no one else there, and when they left and I went to bed, the watch was gone.

"It is a great loss to me, Father. Not for the value of the watch, though it is entirely of gold and rubies, not for its usefulness, since it does not go; but for its sentimental worth, Father. It has been in my family so long, being given to me by my father who had it from his father and before that—"

Father Rosario raised a thin hand and interrupted him. "It is a possession no man would wish to lose, Giorgio, and it shall be returned to you."

At this I saw the four men look up, the work of their hands stilled momentarily. Father Rosario settled himself more comfortably on the boat's gunwale and his long dark face no longer smiled. He looked around at the men, his eyes travelling from one to the other, and one by one they turned their gaze from him as though in his searching eyes there was a power that made them uncomfortable.

Then slowly he began to speak. "There have, my children, for a long time now been many such petty thefts in our community. You must know of them as I do. It is not a good thing to have amongst us for it turns friend against friend. If among four men there is a thief, then his guilt touches the three innocent men. However, these thefts which we have had here arise not so much from evil or a desire for gain as from vanity or a desire for excitement. Giorgio, if your watch were returned, would you be content never to know the name of the thief?"

Giorgio hesitated for a while, then he said, "If the watch is returned I shall be happy."

"Then it shall be."

"But how can this be, Father?" asked Giuseppe.

"Because, Giuseppe, I know who the thief is." Father Rosario paused and I could sense the surprise and tension amongst the men. Not a man there doubted his word. Father Rosario went on: "He shall return the watch, and later I shall speak to him in private and he will never steal again."

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" But if he hands over the watch now, Father, we shall know him," said Giorgio.

" No. It shall be done this way, Giorgio. Beginning with Carlo, each man—Giuseppe, Mario, and Beppo—shall take it in turns to leave us. They shall go across the square and up to your house. Each man shall be given five minutes and then shall return. The thief will put the watch back and you will never know who it is. But I shall know, and he shall answer to me."

I could see how much respect and simple wonder there was in them for Father Rosario. None of them doubted that he knew already who had the watch, and the thief himself must have felt very uncomfortable at the prospect of his coming interview with Father Rosario.

Carlo, the old man with the moustache, was the first to go. While he was gone we sat and talked and Father Rosario arranged for Giorgio to take me out in his boat. After Carlo's return, Giuseppe went. He came back grinning. Mario and Beppo took their turns.

As Beppo came down the steps Father Rosario rose. " And now, Giorgio, go and get your watch." Father Rosario sent the fisherman off. He was back very quickly, panting and beaming and holding the gold watch.

" It is a miracle, Father! " he cried.

" No, my son, it is not a miracle," Father Rosario said gently. " And now think no more of it. These are your friends and will remain your friends. However, there is one man among you who will come to me this evening and we shall talk. Let him not fail to come for then I shall go to him and make his shame public."

We walked away along the sands.

" And who was the thief? " I asked after a while.

Father Rosario smiled. " You do not live amongst us so I shall tell you. It is Giuseppe. He is fat and full of life and very easily bored. During the war he had the finest partisan record of all. He steals not from evil but from a desire to take risks. I shall talk to him about it and he will do it no more."

" And you knew this from the start? "

" No. Only when all the men had returned. Put yourself in their place, my son. What would you have done if you had been one of them, and innocent, and I had sent you to Giorgio's house? "

" I'd have gone across the square, round the corner, waited my five minutes, and come back. Why walk up the hill to a house if I had nothing to replace? "

" Exactly. And that is what they all did—except Giuseppe."

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"But how do you know Giuseppe went up to the house?"

"All the men were barefooted. To reach Giorgio's house you have to cross the stepping-stones which are flooded. When Giuseppe returned, his feet were washed free of sand and his ankles were still wet. The others still had dry, sandy feet."

Father Rosario turned his head towards me and his dark eyes were warm, smiling. "This evening Giuseppe will come to me, and we shall talk together over a glass of wine, and there will be no more thefts."

* * *

BEARING UP

Joaquin Miller attracted attention in Washington by living in a log cabin. Log cabins were not a rarity in 1883, but it seldom happened that a person built one himself and voluntarily lived in it. Now the poet, who said he yearned for solitude, found that his home was not quite "a little edge of God's rest." A steady stream of visitors came to examine his cabin, and to examine Joaquin Miller.

Many of the callers were Congressmen who had brought their constituents to see the poet Miller. The people would start trooping to the cabin early in the afternoon, and many of them would bring slabs of ham or flitches of bacon to present to the bard. Those who were better acquainted with Joaquin's tastes would bring whisky, and usually they were the ones who were invited to stay for potluck. Joaquin grumbled that the visitors were driven his way by curiosity and not because they loved (and bought) his poems. Of course, he could have refused to see the constant stream of intruders, but he did not, and he was always suitably garbed in his frontier outfit when the callers came.

When Joaquin saw the visitors making their way through the tall grass in his yard he usually would take the bearskin from the dirty floor, sling it over his shoulder, and stand statuesque in the doorway. The callers were fascinated by the bearskin and liked to finger it, for, as Joaquin assured them, it was the identical bearskin he had worn during the days of his London triumphs, the same bearskin that had been handled and admired by Queen Victoria, the Princess Alexandra, the Shah of Persia, and a host of others. One day an awed visitor was so impressed that he offered a large sum for the historic trophy. Joaquin reluctantly parted with the combination rug-robe.

A few days later, a new bearskin was on the floor. The market held up well, and it is said that the poet disposed of no less than nine of the "authentic" London bearskins.

M. M. MARBERRY, *Splendid Poseur*

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LANGUAGE OF LOVE

And sure in language strange she said,
"I love thee true!"

JOHN KEATS, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*

"He wrote some verses on her, and very pretty they were."

"And so ended his affection," said Elizabeth impatiently. "There has been many a one, I fancy, overcome in the same way. I wonder who first discovered the efficacy of poetry in driving away love!"

"I have been used to consider poetry as the *food* of love," said Darcy.

"Of a fine, stout, healthy love it may. Everything nourishes what is strong already. But if it be only a slight, thin sort of inclination, I am convinced that one good sonnet will starve it entirely away."

JANE AUSTEN, *Pride and Prejudice*

Nonsense-Verse

Ah, there she flits before me, whose gay scent
Betrays the way she went;
A corner intercepts her, she is gone;
And as I follow, indolent,
My visiting mind, with her to muse upon,
Runs curiously on.

I seem to hear her mount the narrow stair,
Creaking for all her care;
And now a door flies open, just above,
And now she laughs, to see him there,
His arms about her, and both babble of
The nonsense-verse of love . . .

ARTHUR SYMONS, *Love and Art*

Sweet Nothings

"What feeling! what sentiment!" thought Miss Teresa, as she leaned more heavily on her companion's arm.

"But enough—enough!" resumed the elegant Sparkins, with a theatrical air. "What have I said? what have I—I—to do with

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sentiments like these? Miss Malderton—" here he stopped short —" may I hope to be permitted to offer the humble tribute of—"

" Really, Mr. Sparkins," returned the enraptured Teresa, blushing in the sweetest confusion, " I must refer you to papa. I never can, without his consent, venture to—"

" Surely he cannot object—"

" Oh, yes. Indeed, indeed, you know him not! " interrupted Miss Teresa, well knowing there was nothing to fear, but wishing to make the interview resemble a scene in some romantic novel.

" He cannot object to my offering you a glass of negus," returned the adorable Sparkins, with some surprise.

" Is that all? " thought the disappointed Teresa. " What a fuss about nothing! "

CHARLES DICKENS, *Sketches by Boz*

Prosaic

It was about this time he fell in love
With his Head Master's niece, a circumstance
Which taught him that, in English, rhymes in "uv"
To speed the ardent sonneteer's descants
Are sadly limited; that "glove" and "shove"
Do not accord with mouthings of romance
And, as the rhyming dictionary shows,
Love is more practical by far in prose.

GEOFFREY PARSONS, *Peter's Progress*

Basic Mandarin

" Say, Mr. Flower, do you like our Chinese gals? . . . Maybe you find them a bit phlegmatic. Most foreigners do. That's simply because they don't know the right way to get around them, even when they know the lingo. It needs a special vocabulary, I'm telling you! Soft words, words of passion, are required to make red-hot mommers of 'em. For instance—shall I teach you a few flaming words of passion, Mr. Flower? "

Mr. Pan's long submersion in the U.S.A. seemed to have melted that reserve which is almost a racial trait. His tongue behaved like a carburettor. While he was offering Philip unsolicited advice on the technique of a Chinese love-affair, which differed not a whit from the generality of such transactions, Mr. An was offering him snuff.

HAROLD ACTON, *Peonies and Ponies*

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Biting Comment

The old dream comes again to me:
With May-night stars above,
We two sat under the linden tree
And swore eternal love.

Again and again we plighted troth,
We chattered, and laughed, and kissed;
To make me well remember my oath
You gave me a bite in the wrist.

O darling with the eyes serene,
And with the teeth so white!
The vows were proper to the scene,
Superfluous was the bite.

HEINRICH HEINE, 1797–1856,
translated by JAMES THOMSON

Reasonable Terms

He sat down, and produced the following *morceau*, which was transmitted to Miss Appleby.

" Madam—Understanding you have a parcel of heart, warranted sound, to be disposed of, shall be willing to treat for said commodity, on reasonable terms; doubt not, shall agree for same; shall wait on you for farther information, when and where you shall appoint. This the needful from—

Yours, &c., GAM. PICKLE."

This laconic epistle, simple and unadorned as it was, met with as cordial a reception as if it had been couched in the most elegant terms; nay, I believe, was the more welcome, on account of its mercantile plainness; because when an advantageous match is in view, a sensible woman often considers the flowery professions and rapturous exclamations of love as ensnaring ambiguities that retard the treaty they are designed to promote; whereas Mr. Pickle removed all disagreeable uncertainty, by descending at once to the most interesting particular.

TOBIAS SMOLLETT, *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle*

Actions Speak Louder . . .

They that are rich in words, in words discover
That they are poor in that which makes a lover.

SIR WALTER RALEIGH, *The Silent Lover*

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THE GOLDEN BOX

The thing whispered and talked, could laugh sometimes

by RAY BRADBURY

THE cellar was cold cement and the dead man was cold stone, and the air was filled with an invisible fall of rain, while the people gathered to look at the body. The gravity of the earth was drawn to a focus here in this single basement room—a gravity so immense that it pulled their faces down, bent their mouths at the corners, and drained their cheeks. Their hands hung weighted, and their feet were planted so they could not move without seeming to walk under water.

A voice was calling but nobody listened.

The voice called again and only after a long time did the people turn and look, momentarily, into the air. They were at the seashore and this was a gull crying over their heads in the grey colour of dawn. It was a sad crying, like the birds going south for the steel winter to come. It was an ocean sounding the shore so far away that it was only a whisper of sand and wind in a seashell.

The people in the basement room shifted their gaze to a table and a golden box resting there, no more than twenty-four inches long, inscribed with the name RIABOUCHINSKA. Under the lid of this small coffin the voice at last settled with finality, and the people stared at the box, and the dead man lay on the floor, not hearing the soft cry.

" Let me out, let me out, oh please, please, someone let me out."

And finally Mr. Fabian, the ventriloquist, bent and whispered to the golden box, " No, Ria, this is serious business. Later. Be quiet now, that's a good girl." He shut his eyes and tried to laugh.

From under the polished lid her calm voice said, " Please don't laugh. You should be much kinder now after what's happened."

Detective Lieutenant Krovitch touched Fabian's arm. " If you don't mind we'll save your dummy act for later. Right now there's all *this* to clean up." He glanced at the woman, who had now taken a folding chair. " Mrs. Fabian." He nodded to the young man sitting next to her. " Mr. Douglas, you're Mr. Fabian's press-agent and manager? "

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The young man said he was. Krovitch looked at the face of the man on the floor. "Fabian, Mrs. Fabian, Mr. Douglas—all of you say you don't know this man who was murdered here last night, never heard the name Ockham before. Yet Ockham earlier told the stage manager he knew Fabian and had to see him about something vitally important."

The voice in the box began again quietly.

Krovitch shouted. "*Damn* it, Fabian!"

Under the lid, the voice laughed. It was like a muffled bell, ringing. "Pay no attention to her, Lieutenant," said Fabian.

"Her? Or *you*, damn it! What is this? Get together, you two!"

"We'll never be together," said the quiet voice, "never again after tonight."

Krovitch put out his hand. "Give me the key, Fabian."

In the silence there was the rattle of the key in the small lock, the squeal of the miniature hinges as the lid was opened and laid back against the table-top.

"Thank you," said Riabouchinska.

Krovitch stood motionless, just looking down and seeing Riabouchinska in her box, and not quite believing what he saw.

The face was white and it was cut from marble or from the whitest wood he had ever seen. It might have been cut from snow. And the neck that held the head, which was as dainty as a porcelain cup with the sun shining through the thinness of it, the neck was also white. And the hands could have been ivory and they were thin small things with tiny fingernails and whorls on the pads of the fingers, little delicate spirals and lines.

She was all white stone, with light pouring through the stone and light coming out of the dark eyes, with blue tones beneath like fresh mulberries. He was reminded of milk-glass and cream poured in a crystal tumbler. The brows were arched and black and thin, and the cheeks were hollowed and there was a faint pink vein in each temple and a blue vein barely visible above the slender bridge of the nose, between the shining dark eyes.

Her lips were half parted and it looked as if they might be slightly damp, and the nostrils were arched and modelled perfectly as were the ears. The hair was black and it was parted in the middle and drawn back from the ears, and it was real—he could see every single strand of hair. Her gown was as black as her hair and draped in such a fashion as to show her shoulders, which were carved wood as white as a stone that had lain a long time in the sun. She was very beautiful.

Krovitch felt his throat move, and then he stopped and did not say anything.

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Fabian took Riabouchinska from her box. "My lovely lady," he said. "Carved from the rarest imported woods. She's appeared in Paris, Rome, Istanbul. Everyone in the world loves her and thinks she's really human, some sort of incredibly delicate midget-creature. They won't accept that she was once part of many forests growing far away from cities and idiotic people."

Fabian's wife, Alyce, watched her husband, not taking her eyes from his mouth. Her eyes did not blink once in all the time he was speaking of the doll he held in his arms. He, in turn, seemed aware of no one but the doll—The cellar and its people were lost in a mist that settled everywhere.

But finally the small figure stirred and quivered. "Please, don't talk about me! You know Alyce doesn't like it."

"Alyce never *has* liked it."

"Shh, don't!" cried Riabouchinska. "Not here, not now." And then, swiftly, she turned to Krovitch and her tiny lips moved. "How did it all happen? Mr. Ockham, I mean, Mr. Ockham."

Fabian said, "You'd better go to sleep now, Ria . . ."

"But I don't *want* to," she replied. "I've as much right to listen and talk, I'm as much a part of this murder as Alyce or—or Mr. Douglas even!"

The press-agent threw down his cigarette. "Don't drag me into this, you—" And he looked at the doll as if it had suddenly become six feet tall and was breathing there before him.

"It's just that I want the truth to be told." Riabouchinska turned her head to see all of the room. "And if I'm locked in my coffin there'll be no truth, for John's a consummate liar and I must watch after him, isn't that right, John?"

"Yes," he said, his eyes shut, "I suppose it is."

"John loves me best of all the women in the world and I love him and try to understand his wrong way of thinking."

Krovitch hit the table with his fist. "Damn, oh *damn* it! Fabian! If you think you can—"

"I'm helpless," said Fabian.

"But she's—"

"I know, I know what you want to say," said Fabian quietly, looking at the detective. "She's in my throat, is that it? No, no. She's not in my throat. She's somewhere else. I don't know. Here, or here." He touched his chest, his head.

"She's quick to hide. Sometimes there's nothing I can do. Sometimes she is only herself, nothing of me at all. Sometimes she tells me what to do and I must do it. She stands guard, she reprimands me, is honest where I am dishonest, good when I am wicked as all the sins that ever were. She lives a life apart.

"She's raised a wall in my head and lives there, ignoring me if

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I try to make her say improper things, co-operating if I suggest the right words and pantomime." Fabian sighed. "So, if you intend going on I'm afraid Ria must be present. Locking her up will do no good, no good at all."

Lieutenant Krovitch sat silently for the better part of a minute, then made his decision. "All right. Let her stay. It just may be that before the night's over I'll be tired enough to ask even a ventriloquist's dummy questions."

Krovitch unwrapped a fresh cigar, lit it, and puffed smoke. "So you don't recognize the dead man, Mr. Douglas?"

"He looks vaguely familiar. Could be an actor."

Krovitch swore. "Let's all stop lying, what do you say? Look at Ockham's shoes, his clothing. It's obvious he needed money and came here tonight to beg, borrow, or steal some. Let me ask you this, Douglas—are you in love with Mrs. Fabian?"

"Now wait just a moment!" cried Alyce Fabian.

Krovitch motioned her down. "You sit there, side by side, the two of you. I'm not exactly blind. When a press-agent sits where the husband should be sitting, consoling the wife, *well*! The way you look at the marionette's coffin, Mrs. Fabian, holding your breath when she appears. You clench your fists when she talks. Hell, you're obvious."

"If you think for one moment I'm jealous of a stick of wood!"

"*Aren't* you?"

"No, no, I'm *not*!"

Fabian moved. "You needn't tell him anything, Alyce."

"*Let* her!" They all jerked their heads and stared at the small figurine whose mouth was now slowly shutting. Even Fabian looked at the marionette as if it had struck him a blow.

After a long while Alyce Fabian began to speak.

"I married John seven years ago because he said he loved me and because I loved him and I loved Riabouchinska. At first, anyway. But then I began to see that he really lived all of his life and paid most of his attentions to her and I was a shadow waiting in the wings every night.

"He spent fifty thousand dollars a year on her wardrobes—one hundred thousand dollars for a doll's house with gold and silver and platinum furniture. He tucked her in a small satin bed each night, and talked to her. I thought it was all an elaborate joke at first and I was wonderfully amused.

"But when it finally came to me that I was indeed merely an assistant in his act I began to feel a vague sort of hatred and distrust, not for the marionette, because after all it wasn't her doing—but I felt a terrible growing dislike and hatred for John,

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because it *was* his fault. He, after all, was the control and all of his cleverness and natural sadism came out through his relationship with the wooden doll.

" And when I finally became very jealous, how silly of me! It was the greatest tribute I could have paid him and the way he had set about perfecting the art of throwing his voice. It was all so idiotic, it was all so strange. And yet I knew that something had hold of John, just as people who drink have a hungry animal somewhere in them, starving to death.

" So I moved back and forth from anger to pity, from jealousy to understanding. There were long periods when I didn't hate him at all and I never hated the thing that Ria was in him, for she was the best half, the good part, the honest and the lovely part of him. She was everything that he never let himself try to be." Alyce Fabian stopped and the basement room was silent.

" Explain about Mr. Douglas," said a voice, whispering.

Mrs. Fabian did not look up at the marionette. With an effort she finished it out. " When the years passed and there was so little love and understanding from John, I guess it was natural I turned to—Mr. Douglas."

Krovitch nodded. " Everything begins to fall into place. Mr. Ockham was a very poor man, down on his luck, and he came to this theatre tonight because he knew something about you and Mr. Douglas. Perhaps he threatened to speak to Mr. Fabian if you didn't buy him off. That would give you the best of reasons to get rid of him."

" That's even sillier than all the rest," said Alyce Fabian, tiredly. " I didn't kill him."

" Mr. Douglas might have and not told you."

" Why kill a man? " said Douglas. " John knew all about us."

" I did indeed," said John Fabian and laughed.

He stopped laughing and his hand twitched, hidden in the snow-flake interior of the tiny doll, and her mouth opened and shut, opened and shut—he was trying to make her carry the laughter on after he had stopped—but there was no sound, save the little empty whisper of her lips moving and gasping, while Fabian stared down at the little face and perspiration came out, shining, upon his cheeks.

The next afternoon Lieutenant Krovitch moved through the theatre darkness backstage, found the iron stairs, and climbed with great thought, taking as much time as he deemed necessary on each step, up to the second-level dressing-rooms. He rapped on one of the thin-panelled doors. " Come in," said Fabian's voice from what seemed a great distance.

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Krovitch entered and closed the door and stood looking at the man who was slumped before his dressing-mirror. "I have something I'd like to show you," he said at last. His face showing no emotion whatever, Krovitch opened a folder and pulled out a glossy photograph which he placed on the dressing-table.

John Fabian raised his eyebrows, glanced quickly up at Krovitch, and then settled slowly back in his chair. He put his fingers to the bridge of his nose and massaged his face carefully as if he had a headache. Krovitch turned the picture over and began to read from the typewritten data on the back.

"Name, Miss Ilyana Riamonova. One hundred pounds. Blue eyes. Black hair. Oval face. Born nineteen hundred and fourteen, New York City. Disappeared nineteen hundred and thirty-four. Believed a victim of amnesia. Of Russo-Slav parentage."

Fabian's lips twitched. Krovitch laid the photograph down, shaking his head thoughtfully. "It was pretty silly of me to go through police files for a picture of a marionette. You should have heard the laughter at Headquarters. Still—here she *is*—Riabouchinska. *Not* papier-maché, *not* wood, *not* a puppet, but a woman who once lived and moved around and—disappeared." He looked steadily at Fabian. "Suppose you take it from there?"

Fabian half smiled. "There's nothing to it at all. I saw this woman's picture a long time ago, liked her looks, and made my marionette like her."

"Nothing to it at all." Krovitch took a deep breath and exhaled, wiping his face with a huge handkerchief. "Fabian, this very morning I shuffled through a stack of magazines *that* high. In the year nineteen hundred and thirty-four I found an interesting article concerning an act which played in a second-rate touring company, known as Fabian and Sweet William. Sweet William was a little boy dummy.

"There was a girl assistant—Ilyana Riamonova. No picture of her in the article but I at least had a *name*, the name of a *real* person, to go on. It was simple to check police files then and dig up this picture. The resemblance between the live woman on one hand and the puppet on the other is nothing short of incredible. Suppose you go back and tell your story over again, Fabian?"

"She was my assistant, that's all. I used her as a model."

"You're making me sweat," said the detective. "Do you think I'm a fool? Do you think I don't know love when I see it? I've watched you handle the marionette, I've seen you talk to it, I've seen how you make it react to you. You're in love with the puppet naturally, because you loved the original woman very, *very* much. I've lived too long not to sense that. Hell, Fabian, stop fencing around."

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Fabian lifted his pale slender hands, turned them over, examined them, and let them fall.

"All right. In nineteen hundred and thirty-four I was billed as Fabian and Sweet William. Sweet William was a small bulb-nosed boy dummy I carved a long time ago. I was in Los Angeles when this girl appeared at the stage door one night. She'd followed my work for years. She was desperate for a job and she hoped to be my assistant . . ."

He remembered her in the half-light of the alley behind the theatre, and how startled he was at her freshness and eagerness to work with and for him, and the way the cool rain touched softly down the narrow alleyway and caught in small spangles through her hair, melting in dark warmness, and the rain beaded upon her white porcelain hand holding her coat together at her neck.

He saw her lips motion in the dark and her voice, separated off on another sound-track it seemed, speaking to him in the autumn wind, and he remembered that without saying yes or no or perhaps, she was suddenly on the stage with him, in the great pouring bright light, and in two months he, who had always prided himself on his cynicism and disbelief, had stepped off the rim of the world after her, plunging down a bottomless place of no limit and no light anywhere.

Arguments followed and more than arguments—things said and done that lacked all sense and sanity and fairness. She had edged away from him at last, causing his rages and remarkable hysterias. Once he burnt her entire wardrobe in a fit of jealousy. She had taken this quietly. But then one night he handed her a week's notice, accused her of monstrous disloyalty, shouted at her, seized her, slapped her face again and again, bullied her about, and thrust her out of the door, slamming it!

—She disappeared that night.

When he found the next day that she was really gone and there was nowhere to find her, it was like standing in the centre of a titanic explosion. All the world was smashed flat and all the echoes of the explosion came back to reverberate at midnight, at four in the morning, at dawn, and he was up early, stunned, with the sound of coffee simmering and the sound of matches being struck and cigarettes lit and himself trying to shave and looking at mirrors that were sickening in their distortion.

He clipped out all the advertisements that he put in the papers and pasted them in neat rows in a scrap-book—all the ads describing her and explaining about her and asking for her back. He even put a private detective on the case. People talked. The police dropped in to question him. There was more talk.

But she was gone like a piece of white, incredibly fragile tissue-

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paper, blown over the sky and down. A record of her was sent to the largest cities, and that was the end of it for the police. But not for Fabian. She might be dead or just running away, but wherever she was he knew that somehow and in some way he would have her back. One night he came home, bringing his own darkness with him, and before he knew it, he found himself speaking to Sweet William, in the totally black room.

"William, it's all over and done. I *can't* keep it up!"

And William cried, "Coward!" from the air above his head, out of the emptiness. "You can get her back if you want!"

"No, I can't. No, I can never get her back."

Sweet William squeaked and clappered at him in the night. "Yes, you can! *Think*!" he insisted. "Think of a way. You can do it. Put me aside, lock me up. Start all over again."

"Start all over again?"

"Yes," whispered Sweet William and darkness moved within darkness. "Yes. Buy wood. Buy fine new wood. Buy hard-grained wood. Buy beautiful fresh new wood. And carve. Carve slowly and carefully. Whittle away. Cut delicately. Make the little nostrils, so. Cut her thin black eyebrows, round and high, *so*, and make her cheeks in small hollows. Carve, carve . . ."

"No! It's foolish. I could *never* do it!"

"Yes, you could. Yes, you could, could, could . . ."

The voice faded, a ripple of water in an underground stream. The stream rose up and swallowed him. His head fell forward. Sweet William sighed. And then the two of them lay like stones buried under a waterfall.

The next morning, John Fabian bought the hardest, finest-grained piece of wood that he could find and brought it home and laid it on the table but could not touch it. He sat for hours staring at it. It was impossible to think that out of this cold chunk of material he expected his hands and his memory to re-create something warm and pliable and familiar. There was no way even faintly to approximate that quality of rain and summer and the first powderings of snow upon a clear pane of glass in the middle of a December night. No way, no way at all to catch the snowflake without having it melt swiftly away in your clumsy fingers.

And yet, Sweet William spoke out, sighing and whispering, after midnight, "You can do it. Oh yes, yes, you can do it!"

And so he began. It took him an entire month to carve her hands into things as natural and beautiful as shells lying in the sun. Another month and the skeleton, like a fossil imprint he was searching out, stamped and hidden in the wood, was revealed, all febrile and so infinitely delicate as to suggest the veins in the white flesh of an apple.

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And all the while Sweet William lay mantled in dust in his box that was fast becoming a very real coffin. Sweet William croaking and wheezing some feeble sarcasm, some sour criticism, some hint, some help—but dying all the time, fading, soon to be untouched, soon to be like a sheath moulted in summer and left behind to blow in the wind.

As the weeks passed and Fabian moulded and scraped and polished the new wood, Sweet William lay longer and longer in stricken silence, and one day as Fabian held the puppet in his hand, Sweet William seemed to look at him a moment with puzzled eyes, and then there was a death-rattle in his throat.

And Sweet William was gone.

Now as he worked, a fluttering, a faint motion of speech began far back in his throat, echoing and re-echoing, speaking silently like a breeze among dry leaves. And then for the first time he held the doll in a certain way in his hands and memory moved down his arms and into his fingers and from his fingers into the hollowed wood, the tiny hands flickered and the body became suddenly soft and pliable, and her eyes opened and looked up at him.

The small mouth opened the merest fraction of an inch, and she was ready to speak and he knew all the things she must say to him, he knew the first and the second and the third things he would have her say. There was a whisper, a whisper, a whisper.

The tiny head turned this way gently, that way gently. The mouth half opened again and began to speak. And as it spoke he bent his head and he could feel the warm breath—of *course* it was there!—coming from her mouth and when he listened very carefully, holding her to his head, his eyes shut, wasn't *it* there, too—softly, *gently*—the beating of her heart?

Krovitch sat in a chair for a full minute after Fabian stopped talking. Finally he said, " I see. And your wife? "

" Alyce? She was my second assistant, of course. She worked very hard and, God help her, she loved me. It's hard now to know why I ever married her. It was unfair of me."

" What about the dead man—Ockham? "

" I never saw him before you showed me his body in the theatre basement yesterday."

" Fabian," said the detective.

" It's the truth! "

" Fabian."

" The truth, the truth, damn it, I swear it's the truth! "

" The truth." There was a whisper like the sea coming in on the grey shore at early morning. The birds were flying south and always south. The water was ebbing in a fine lace on the

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sand. The sky was cold. There were no people on the shore. The sun was gone. The whisper said again, "The truth."

Fabian sat up straight and took hold of his knees with his thin hands. His face was rigid. Krovitch found himself making the same motion he had made the day before—looking at the grey ceiling as if it were a November sky and a lonely bird going over and away, grey within the cold greyness.

"The truth." Fading. "The truth."

Krovitch lifted himself and moved as carefully as he could to the far side of the dressing-room where the golden box lay open, and inside the box the thing that whispered and talked and could laugh sometimes and could sometimes sing. He carried the golden box over and set it down in front of Fabian and waited for him to put his living hand within the gloved delicate hollowness, waited for the fine small mouth to quiver and the eyes to focus. He did not have to wait long.

"The first letter came a month ago."

"No."

"The first letter came a month ago."

"No, *no*!"

"The letter said, RIABOUCHINSKA, *Born nineteen hundred and fourteen—Died nineteen hundred and thirty-four. Born again in nineteen hundred and thirty-five.* Mr. Ockham was a juggler. He'd been on the same bill with John and Sweet William years before. He remembered that once there had been a woman *before* there was a puppet."

"No, that's not true!"

"Yes," said the voice.

Snow was falling in silences and even deeper silences through the dressing-room. Fabian's mouth trembled. He stared at the blank walls as if seeking some new door by which to escape. He half rose from his chair. "Please . . ."

"Ockham threatened to tell about us to everyone in the world."

"No, please . . ." The voice stopped.

Fabian looked down at the carved white face and nodded slowly. He swallowed and took a breath. He looked at the detective. "I wanted my life to myself. What sort of future would there be, if everyone guessed the reason for my carving a doll that talked and moved and was so beautiful?

"People would laugh. People would turn away. 'Ugly,' they'd say. 'Horrible! *Look* at them on the stage!' they'd whisper. 'Listen to them quoting *Romeo and Juliet*—Look, look at those terrible people on the stage! 'Hideous!' they'd whisper. 'She lived once, you know,' they'd whisper. 'She disappeared. They say he *killed* her. They say he *loved* her!'"

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Krovitch spoke quietly. "How much did Ockham want?"

"A thousand dollars to start. More later."

"And so you killed him."

"No, I didn't. I paid him off!"

"We found no money on him."

"I paid him! Alyce and Douglas must have heard us talking. They've wanted to be rid of me for years now. I'm not blind! Alyce saw a way of ridding herself of me, satisfying her jealousy, and getting some money, too. It's all *very* clear!"

"No."

A single drop of clear water falling down into the cool surface of a well.

"No . . ."

A single harp-thread, touched, breathed upon.

"There's something I must say. And yet," she whispered, "I can't say it . . ."

Krovitch saw the doll quiver, saw the fluttering of the lips, saw Fabian's eyes widen and fix and his throat convulse and tighten as if to stop the whispering.

"I—I was in the room when Mr. Ockham came. I lay in my box and I listened and I heard, and I *know*." The voice blurred, then recovered, and went on: "Mr. Ockham threatened to tear me up, burn me into ashes if John didn't pay him a thousand dollars. Then suddenly there was a falling sound! A cry! Mr. Ockham's head must have struck the floor! I heard John cry out and I heard him swearing, I heard him sobbing. I heard a gasping and a choking sound."

"You heard nothing! You're deaf, you're blind! You're *wood*!" cried Fabian.

"But I *hear*!" she said, and stopped as if someone had put a hand to her mouth.

Fabian had leapt to his feet now and stood with the doll in his hand. The mouth clapped twice, three times, then finally made words. "The choking sound stopped. I heard John drag Mr. Ockham down the stairs under the theatre to the old dressing-rooms that haven't been used for years. Down, down, down I heard them going away and away—down . . ."

Krovitch stepped back as if he were watching a motion picture that had suddenly grown monstrously tall. The figures terrified and frightened him, they were immense, they *towered*! They threatened to inundate him with size. Someone had turned up the sound so that it screamed.

Everything was white and bloodless, everything swayed and toppled, the avalanche trembled on the brink, ready to drop in thunders of shale and flint and marble and cutting ice. He saw

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Fabian's teeth, a grimace, a whisper, a clenching. He saw the man's eyes squeeze shut.

Now the soft voice was so high and faint it was like the last flake of snow moving towards the warm earth, which in a moment would melt it away to nothingness.

"I'm not made to live this way. This way. There's nothing for us now. Everyone will know, everyone will. Even when you killed him and I lay asleep last night, I dreamt I knew, I realized. We both knew, we *both* realized that these would be our last days, our last hours. I've lived with weakness and I've lived with your lies, but I can't live with something that kills and hurts in killing. There's no way to go on from here. How *can* I go on living with such knowledge . . .?"

Fabian held her into the sunlight which shone dimly through the small dressing-room window. She looked at him and there was nothing in her eyes. His hand shook and in shaking made the marionette tremble too. Her mouth closed and opened, closed and opened, closed and opened, again and again and again —Silence.

The snowflakes touched the earth and melted.

Fabian moved his fingers unbelievingly to his own mouth. A film slid across his eyes. He looked like a man lost in the street, trying to remember the number of a certain house, trying to find a certain window with a certain light. He swayed about, staring at the walls, at Krovitch, at the doll, at his free hand, turning the fingers over, touching his throat, opening his mouth. He listened.

Miles away in a cave, a single wave came in from the sea and whispered down in foam. A gull moved soundlessly, not beating its wings—a shadow.

"She's gone. She's gone. I can't find her. She's run off. I can't find her. I can't find her. I try, I try, but she's run away far off. Will you help me? Will you help me find her? Will you help me find her? Will you please help me find her?"

Riabouchinska slipped bonelessly from his limp hand, folded over, and glided noiselessly down to lie upon the cold floor, her eyes closed, her mouth shut.

Fabian did not look at her as Krovitch led him to the door.

* * *

SINGULAR TASTE

Anybody amuses me for once. A new acquaintance is like a new book. I prefer it, even if bad, to a classic.

BENJAMIN DISRAELI

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SUMMER KING

One morning a gasp of excitement sounded at the quay

by F. L. GREEN

THE island was ten miles from the mainland; and except during a few weeks in the summer of the year, its lofty shape was concealed by cloud or mist or the driving storms that blew along the coast. It was twelve miles long and nowhere broader than four or five miles. Sometimes, in the winter, it appeared like a sombre cloud that had settled upon the sea. The sinking sun behind it threw its shape into relief; and the summits of its cliffs were visible against the glory of sunset, before night and the rising tempest swallowed it.

But in summer the island gleamed clearly and softly in the temperate light. Its fields could be seen from the mainland. All along the inner shore there were little bays with sands. Small stone quays jutted out from the rocks, and in the harbours fishing vessels floated. Sometimes, the air was so clear that one could see the white shapes of the island's two hotels standing ten miles apart. All around them were the green fields and above them was the blue sky. A line of dazzling foam encircled the island which appeared vivid and enticing in the summer sunlight.

The great stone face which confronted the western ocean was invisible from the mainland. Only its green slopes showed. It was not until visitors rounded the island and saw those gigantic black cliffs rising sheer above the violent seas to a height of eight or nine hundred feet that the real character of the place occurred to them. It was nothing but a great rock, solid and stubborn in the ocean, with a few acres of arable land upon which the inhabitants and their ancestors had scraped a wretched existence for centuries.

Besides working their plots, the islanders were famous fishermen. Also, throughout the winter, they carved little curios out of wood and small pieces of rock, and these they sold to summer visitors who enjoyed the windy solitude and the ruggedness of the island.

Visitors were accommodated not only at the two hotels but at several houses. Three times a week, the steamer from the mainland reached the island with a conglomerate general cargo,

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a few returning islanders, several dogs, and numbers of visitors. The latter were met on the pier by the hotel proprietors, who ushered them to several ancient motor-cars, or carts drawn by decrepit horses. At the pier some villagers were always congregated. They watched the cargo being unloaded, and with a few sly smiles amongst themselves they observed the summer visitors who were invariably tall, strong-bodied women and men of austere, scholarly aspect who sat crowded in the motor-cars or carts without speaking to one another.

Presently, when all the cargo was unloaded the Captain came ashore, and stood chatting with some old men. Above them noisy sea-gulls flew. The few onlookers had moved away. It was always the same; and over the scene the inquisitiveness of the island men and their women sank to a kind of indifference. To these people the summer visitors were all alike, and to the visitors the island people were indistinguishable from one another with their gaunt faces and their sceptical expressions.

One summer morning when the passengers came ashore, a gasp of excitement sounded amongst the children and the old women at the quayside. Down the gangway there came a little hunchback. It was a windy morning and he wore a bowler hat and a light overcoat and gloves. In one hand he carried a walking-stick. His suitcase was in the other. As soon as he came ashore he put down the suitcase and looked about him.

He had a sallow skin, but his eyes were large and brown and brilliant. He walked across to a group of island women. They all retreated when he approached, leaving behind a small boy of seven or eight who looked up and met the full smile of the stranger. At once, the little boy laughed.

" Can you point out Mrs. O'Brien to me? " the stranger said.

The child indicated a middle-aged woman standing near an old car. The stranger thanked him, took up his case, and went over. He raised his hat and drew off a glove to offer his hand.

" Mrs. O'Brien, is it? My name is John Waters."

The woman was a native of the island. She had progressed beyond the hard life of the other women, but she had not escaped the great undercurrent of superstition which coursed through life on the island. She seemed nonplussed by this hunchback whose vivid face was lifted candidly to hers in a kind of challenge to the cruel, senseless mass of her superstitions. Gradually, she seemed to make an effort. She accepted his hand; and at that contact with him her tongue, too, was loosened, and she began to welcome him effusively.

" You know, I'm very glad to see you, Mr. Waters. Welcome to the island! It's a great pleasure to have you coming to my

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hotel. The season is early yet, and we have only two other visitors besides your good self. I'm just waiting here for the post, but if you will step into the car I shall not be long and I shall have you to the hotel in twenty minutes. Here's George Cantel himself. Yes, and he has some letters for me."

She helped Waters put his suitcase in the car, then she turned to the postman, who handed her several letters.

"Look at that, now," she said, holding them up in her hand. "There's a dozen there if there's ten, and all of them are from people asking for accommodation. You've brought me good luck already, Mr. Waters! I'm going to have a great season."

The way to the hotel was north from the harbour, and the road lay through the straggling little village and then out across the primitive fields and up through regions of rock and bog to the white shape of the hotel. All the way, she chattered energetically above the rattle of the old car over the stony road. Her mood of icy suspicion was completely transformed, and she unburdened herself to this stranger whose agreeable, attractive nature and brilliant eyes had softened her hard spirit. He sat leaning forward in the back of the car. He knew exactly what kind of welcome he would receive from the island people when he wandered amongst them. A hint of it was conveyed to him by Mrs. O'Brien.

"You'll find the people here very decent, you know. You will bring them good luck, so they will be glad to see you and sorry to see you go. There is not a thing you will want that they won't give you. We have had all sorts of people here and some queer ones, I can tell you, but never a one like yourself to bring us luck. The crops have been bad so far and the mackerel haven't shoaled yet, but you're going to change all that for us."

In the back of the car Waters chuckled. "I'm only staying a fortnight, Mrs. O'Brien! You must not expect things like that from me."

She laughed uproariously.

"Just think of it," she said. "I was expecting a great fellow like the other ones that come here to trample over the rocks, but instead of one of them, there was yourself!"

It seemed to amuse her and when they reached the hotel it was almost the first thing she related to the three peasant girls in the kitchen who had put their heads from the room to see what kind of a person this visitor was. At first they found his appearance terrifying, but Mrs. O'Brien convinced them that already he had brought great luck to her.

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From that moment they were jealous of each other for a glance from him or a summons to carry his bag upstairs. He was not allowed to unpack. One of the girls was sent to summon him down to a great meal which was immediately prepared for him. One was ordered to unpack his suitcase, while another was dispatched to the nearest hamlet with a special message for an old man who dwelt there.

All this happened within the space of an hour. When Waters finished his meal and announced his intention of taking a stroll, he found a cart drawn by a pony awaiting him at the house door.

Mrs. O'Brien explained to him: "Whenever you have a mind to go anywhere on the island, you will find the cart waiting for you at the door here. There is no need for you to wear yourself out, clambering the rocks. Just say the word to my brother Hugh, up on the cart there, and he will drive you."

Waters was a city man, but now that he was on holiday, he had a desire for exercise. Therefore, he shook his head. He had a firm way with him and in a few polite sentences he informed his hostess that he preferred to travel on foot. Mrs. O'Brien gave way to him on that point and withdrew indoors, smiling to herself.

Waters strolled past the cart and followed the road. The old man seated in the cart whipped up the pony which followed Waters at an easy pace for five miles and halted when he halted at the brow of the highest point in the island. Up there it was very warm. Through the motionless air the sunlight beat down relentlessly upon the jagged outcrops of rock and the parched earth. There was a kind of dizziness in the atmosphere.

The old man got down from the cart and lowered himself slowly beside Waters, at whom he looked quizzically. He gave him a nudge with his elbow and broke into a long wheezy laugh.

"God help us, man! Why are you trapesing about up here when there's all the fun in the world waiting for you down there?"

He made a broad sweep with his gnarled hand towards the villages scattered about the island.

"Look down there," he said. "Do you see those places? There's Mick Thompson's and Hugh Donnelly's and half a dozen others; and if you was to as much as put your head round the corner of their doors, they'd have you in and give you everything you could ask for, free and for nothing! And what's more, if you took the fancy to sort of settle down here, you could take your pick of a dozen grand lassies and a great bounty thrown in with her."

He paused and looked at the blue sky and said ruminatively: "Pigs, a wee herd of cows, the goats and the chickens . . ."

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And then, looking at Waters and nudging him again, he said: "You'd live like a king! Sure, you'd need never get up until noon or whatever time you liked. You'd eat of the best and plenty of it. You'd be king of the island!"

Suddenly Waters flicked his little hand at him and rose. "That's enough temptation for one day! You can drive me back to the hotel."

In silence the pair of them climbed into the cart, and in silence they travelled back towards the hotel. There was a small village halfway along the road, and there Waters alighted to look about him. He had not gone far before children gathered round him. They were followed by some men of the village, and then the women. They touched Waters's hands and arms and discussed him amongst themselves. They had never seen anyone like him.

He was small and dainty and his clothes were elegant. His dark eyes were brimming with life, and he had a quick, intelligent expression which proclaimed his power of will and his personality. He was smaller than any man they had seen, but in the stature of his personality and intelligence he surpassed them. The men pressed little gifts on him and drew him into their homes.

Waters was charmed by their behaviour. He had heard a great deal of the island and he was anxious to explore every detail of it and to discover the lives of its inhabitants. He asked a great many questions and was interested in all that he saw and heard. Thinking that there was an ulterior motive in this general interest of his, the villagers did not hesitate to describe their means of livelihood and the way of their lives, for the legend had spread amongst them that some peculiar power attached to him and had already worked a miracle for them.

For a month there had been no rain on the island. The grass was parched and the potato crop was suffering. Moreover, the great shoals of mackerel had not yet appeared. The islanders were confident that all this would now end with the advent amongst them of the little hunchback.

They gave him a pipe and a quantity of tobacco. They set a meal for him at a long table, and the elders of the village came in and sat down. Afterwards, they filled a tankard of ale for him. He drank it in his own time while he listened to their fabulous stories of some hidden wealth on the island, and the pleasures of life that would accrue to such a man as himself if he were to remain there.

Later, there was singing and dancing and more ale. People from other villages had flocked in and they came pressing into the room to look at Waters and to shake hands with him.

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Waters was a realist. In the city from which he came, he lived a solitary life in lodgings. He was an obscure clerk in a manufacturer's office. His colleagues never warmed to him. He had few friends. His life was difficult, but because he had few illusions and no ambitions he enjoyed it.

During the evening in the village he was once again invited by the elders to settle on the island. They promised to find a wife for him and to endow him with land and cattle, and to give him a share of the fishing profits. At first he was amused by the offer, but as the hours passed and more ale was served to him, he became solemn. It was not that the offer had excited his fancy; it was simply that he had come to realize that these people were in earnest.

When he left the village at about ten o'clock, he clambered to his seat on Hugh's cart. The sun had just set and the western firmament was aflame with ruddy clouds, below which the sea was rising. A long cavalcade of carts laden with islanders followed him back to the hotel where he was met by Mrs. O'Brien. A select gathering of influential people from other villages had arrived at the hotel to see him, and until late in the night he was the guest of honour. His toast was drunk, and an old man told stories for him, and a fiddler played traditional island airs.

Next day it was the same. The people of the island spread themselves to flatter him and show him hospitality. He was amused and enchanted, but at the same time he was afraid. That day, rain fell heavily. It was the first rain for several weeks, and the parched land sucked it in.

When the rain ceased, a light breeze blew. The sun came out, and fleets of fishing vessels put out from the bays, for on the summits of the smaller cliffs the watchers were signalling the passage of great shoals of fish off shore.

Seeing all this activity, Waters was troubled in himself. The inhabitants credited the rain and the arrival of the fish to him. And all day long, gifts of all kinds arrived for him. Some of them were very beautiful and his eyes shone when he saw the exquisite fabrics and the curious semiprecious stones, the strange carvings, as well as the jars of spirits. Nothing like this had ever happened to him before. In the city where he worked, nobody gave him presents; he was a nonentity. Consequently, he relished being treated now as a person of regal importance. He appeared solemn and detached. He asked that all the gifts should be placed in one room, then he addressed the old men; he spoke firmly and uncompromisingly.

"Take them away," he said. "Take them all back, and give me peace. Just leave me alone and in peace."

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In silence, he went up to his room. He had brought with him two or three books to read. It was evening. He put one of them under his arm and with his walking-stick in his hand, he left the hotel and strolled out. He found a path which led to the summit of the cliffs and there he settled himself to read.

If he imagined that he had quenched the islanders' fantastic ideas regarding him, he was wrong. He soon discovered that his behaviour had excited them to a greater admiration for him. He had behaved like a king, and the word had gone round that he was to be left in peace and that no man, woman, or child was to speak to him. He was communing with himself, and must be left alone to ponder the future.

When he returned to the hotel, some of the other guests spoke to him.

" These people mean what they say. They really want you to stay on this island."

He shook his head and laughed. " I am just a novelty to them. They think I brought the rain and the mackerel. What nonsense! The rain was due, and so were the fish; and if I hadn't come, the rain would have fallen just the same and the shoals of fish would have come."

One of the women who had spoken to him said: " Novelty or not, it's the chance of a lifetime for you, isn't it? " She laughed loudly and went on: " If they offered me a good man for a husband and a sizeable piece of land and some cattle, I'd say yes at once. I love this island. The people are sweet, I think."

At that moment, the hostess entered the room. Amongst her guests, she had a benignant air. She spoke softly and melodiously, and was always cheerful and obliging.

" It's true, you know," she said. " We look a hard lot, but we are not like the ones in the cities of this world. We have no wars here, and there is nothing for the policeman to do on this island. We treat one another fairly and we fear God and pay our taxes."

Just then, she was called away. When she returned, the women who were her guests had gone out and John Waters was sitting alone in the room. She sat down near him.

" Listen, wee John, please! Hear what I have to say. Don't leave us! Just say the word to me, and you shall have for wife the woman of your choice, and the parcel of land, and what cattle you ask for. Life must be cruel and lonely for such a man as yourself in the big city. Here, it will be kind to you. Our people will honour and respect you. Your wife will obey you and rejoice in you. You will have your land and the cows and

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pigs to keep you occupied. And if anyone is unkind to you, they'll have to reckon with me, for I have authority on this island. I own a good stretch of it. If the people need money for a new boat or a brand-new plough or something, I never refuse to loan it. I would be here to help you always. You would love it."

"Isn't it a jewel of a place? There is never any hurry or clatter, except when there's a wedding or some fun afoot. You will stay, won't you? The people expect it of you. They're ready to make you king of this island. They want to see you and feast you, so just let them. You'll not refuse, will you?"

He gave her his brilliant smile. "I make no promises," he said, shrewdly.

It had cost him a considerable sum to come to this island, and his bill at the hotel was a further expense. He had read of this remote island in the western ocean, as well as of its primitive people, who were unspoiled because they were untouched by modern civilization. He was entranced by the reality of existence on this island long before he had written to reserve accommodation here or begun the lengthy journey to this place. But now all his delight was being spoiled by the problem that confronted him. And the sum that he had contrived to save for this holiday was in danger of being wasted.

"I'll give my decision when my fortnight here is ended," he said. "Don't ask me before that. Let me look around and enjoy my holiday, and after that I'll make up my mind."

Mrs. O'Brien had been very beautiful in girlhood. She had had dark hair and blue eyes and the soft complexion which all the island girls possessed and for which they were famous. For a moment while she looked at him, he imagined that her beauty returned to her.

Her eyes became lustrous. Her hard expression vanished and she turned to him with a look of gratitude and affection. Her grey hair appeared sleek and soft about her face.

"Then we'll leave it like that. But listen: don't refuse the invitations from the people. Just go where they ask you, and enjoy yourself."

"As you wish," Waters said.

He had twelve more days to spend on the island. They became twelve fabulously riotous days. They began soberly enough with trips with the men to the fishing-grounds. He saw the whole process of fishing, and later went down to the market to watch the fine catches being sold to the merchants from the mainland.

Next, he visited the small and large farms of the island and was shown the hardy small cattle, and the crops. He was taken to

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the villages and remote hamlets, and there he saw the weavers at work, and the old craftsmen carving curios from the hard wood which had been dug from the bog. Some of the elders took him amidst the lofty rocks to show him prehistoric remains and strange stones carved thousands of years previously. Others guided him to the dizzy summits of the tallest cliffs from which he looked down upon the western ocean whose great waves assaulted the rocks a thousand feet below.

All the time, he asked questions. He had an insatiable thirst for knowledge. Unlike the austere scholars who visited the island and whose knowledge was like a kind of pride with which to confront the islanders, he was simple and direct. His little body was very active, so were his shrewd mind, and his intelligence which was reflected in his brilliant eyes and the animation of his features.

In the evenings, he was invited to great gatherings where he met the young people. They taught him their dances, and he listened to the fiddlers and learnt the airs and the words of the songs. He was always the guest of honour, and when the tankards of strong ale were put before him, he drank thirstily. Unlike many of the company, he remained sober.

"Look at him!" the elders said. "He drinks like a king. His tongue never falters."

But late at night, he became silent. He sat watching the dancers, the fiddlers, the smoke from the pipes wreathing like a mist in the room. Through the windows, daylight was already visible.

Lost in his own thoughts, he looked about him reflectively. Suddenly, he stood up and struck the table with his little fist.

"Silence, now!" the elders shouted. "Silence for wee John!"

In the hush, he said sternly: "Take me home!"

Draining his tankard, he moved rapidly to the door. Outside, a cart was waiting for him.

"Lift me up!" he said.

The men did as he asked. As soon as he was in the cart, he fell back on the boards, his little limbs sprawled, his thin snore already rising.

"Like a king! Like a great king of the world!" the people said.

Next day, it was the same. He was fêted and applauded wherever he went. Gifts were again lavished upon him. There were so many of them that he was obliged to make a selection. He chose the most beautiful or the most useful of them and had them set neatly aside after he had offered thanks for them. And until the early hours of the mornings, he enjoyed the singing and

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dancing, the eating and drinking, and the honours which were shown him. Then, at dawn, he was taken back to the hotel and set on his bed.

In the past, when he went on holidays, he was left to himself; here, he was treated with lavish generosity and hospitality. Every hour was full of pleasure. He was treated like a rich and powerful person, and his soul was thrilled by the experience. Few ordinary men had ever tasted it. It amused him but at the same time it instructed him.

He listened intently to all that went on around him. Within a week he discovered not only the sharp feuds that ran through the island's life, but the tense struggle for domination between three or four people, at whose head stood his hostess. He smiled to himself, for now he knew that she wanted him for an ally. He did not condemn the behaviour of these people.

Looking clearly into their existence on this island, he saw it in all its truth. Remote from the mainland, they existed in terms of something older than the faith which they professed. They were pagans, still attached to primitive instincts that remained in them from prehistory.

He loved them, but he feared them a little.

When his holiday was ended, he packed his suitcase and asked for his bill.

"There is no bill," Mrs. O'Brien said. "It's a small matter . . ."

"Please," he said. "The bill must be settled."

"No more of that," said Mrs. O'Brien. "You are going to stay with us."

He shook his head. "No. I am going back to my work."

She tried to persuade him to remain. In silence, he let her talk through all her arguments, then he smiled and shook his head. She knew that she had failed to move him. She went down, wrote out his bill, and brought round her car.

The news spread about the island so that, an hour later when he set out for the quay, the people were on the roads to say farewell to him.

He waved to them as he passed in the car. But at the quay a throng had gathered, and when he alighted from the car it surged forward like a wave, and in the next moment he was lifted shoulder high and carried off in the opposite direction.

The steamer was waiting at the quayside, and presently the Captain leaned over the bridge and spoke to the Inspector of Police.

"We're late!" the Captain shouted. "Fetch him aboard, Jamsie, will you?"

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The Inspector strolled slowly towards the crowd which parted for him when he reached it. He went to its centre and lifted wee John from the shoulders of the big man who carried him. Then he hustled him over to the gangway, with the crowd shouting at his heels.

Waters's suitcase was passed up the gangway, then the Inspector motioned the crowd away, and the vessel cast off. The Captain leaned down and beckoned wee John to come to the bridge. The vessel was already moving quickly away from the quay and heading towards the mainland.

It was evening. The sun had sunk behind the island, and the towering summits of the cliffs were defined against the blaze of light in the west.

The Captain was a blithe, tipsy man of forty, unshaven and wearing stained dungarees and a cap. He gave an order to the helmsman and came over to Waters.

" So you wouldn't stay? "

Waters waved to the crowds on the quayside. The sounds of lamenting cries came thinly across the sea.

The Captain spat over the vessel's side.

" You'd have had a lifetime of sweet ease," he said. " Why didn't you stay? "

Waters took him by the arm and pointed to the island's highest summit, whose slopes gleamed in the soft light.

" How high is it? " he asked.

" Eleven hundred and ten feet."

" And on the other side, it falls sheer to the sea? "

The Captain nodded.

" They say I've brought them luck," Waters said. " The crops are rising. After the drought, the rain has come. They're having great catches of fish. They give me credit for bringing all that to them, and if I'd been fool enough to stay, they would have gone on thinking it. But let there come a big storm, or a poor harvest, or some disease of the potato or the cattle, or a shoal of sharks driving away the fish, and then what, eh? " he said, vehemently.

The majestic cliff, jutting into the evening light, looked evil and terrible.

Waters pointed to it.

" Do you see that cliff-top? If I had stayed, and if there had come storm and disease, the young fellows would have invited me for a walk up there. And at the top, they'd have given me a shove, and over I'd go into the sea, a thousand feet below! And who would know, and who would care? And who would bother to look for me? "

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He laughed. He laughed loudly.

The woeful cries from the crowd on the quayside sounded fainter and then ceased as the steamer sped on across the heaving sea towards the mainland. The Captain spat again over the bridge and turned away, smiling.

Waters went down to the shabby little saloon. It was full of scholars and big, raw women returning from holiday on the island. None of them took any notice of him.

★ *"Summer King" was one of the last stories written by F. L. Green, well-known as the author of "Odd Man Out," "On the Night of the Fire," and many other novels. Of Irish and Huguenot descent, the author lived for seventeen years in Ulster.*

★ ★ ★

POINT OF FACT

There is a well-known story told by Whistler of Charles Augustus Howell's machinations to prevent his getting possession of certain proofs from the etchers, Messrs. Graves of Pall Mall. All the business had been transacted through Howell, who had enjoined upon Mr. Graves not to part with any proofs without his written instructions. Even Whistler himself was thus denied access to them, and in a great rage he rushed off to scarify Howell. The latter was profuse with apologies, and promptly wrote the firm a letter of protest, which Whistler himself posted.

Very early next day Whistler called again on Mr. Graves to claim his prints, which were again refused, on the strength of fresh instructions just received from Mr. Howell. Livid with fury, he flicked the letter from the assistant's hands and read: "Of course you will not give Mr. Whistler the proofs he desires." Whistler dashed off to find Howell and confront him with his writing.

"What does this mean?" he roared menacingly, furiously rapping his cane on the floor.

Howell glanced at the note, and was all *mea culpa* and apologies.

"My dear fellow, how stupid of me! . . . All from the omission of a full stop. A thousand apologies . . . Graves had written to ask if they were to put numbers on the proofs, and I, having to write them for you, said 'Of course you will not. Give Mr. Whistler the proofs he desires'—two separate sentences. I'm so sorry."

HELEN ROSSETTI ANGELI,
Pre-Raphaelite Twilight

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★ *Home's all right, but coming home is the very devil—Jan de Hartog packs all the laughter, tumult, and happy tears of a ship's return to port into this vivid episode from his epic of the Dutch tugboats, "Captain Jan."*

HOME IS THE SAILOR

by JAN DE HARTOG

IN his imagination Jan Wandelaar had pictured the scene a hundred times over. First the darkening haze on the horizon, then the dunes emerging from it, yellow and white under a blue sky. Then the pilot's cutter with Nellie on board, waving in the distance; then a longboat with Nellie in it, carrying a small bundle under her arm; then the rope-ladder lowered overboard and then that face, that face that had been smiling at him all those months, radiant as the rising sun on the horizon; that face that now looked up at him from the swaying cutter, smiling and weeping at the same time, longing to get on board and yet frightened for the sake of the child, and then . . .

Hell, he couldn't stretch his imagination any further; but when that wonderful day did come, he'd be able to press her in his arms and feel that she was still alive, and not just that he had sold his soul for a ghost.

A hundred times he had lived through all this, and when it actually happened it turned out to be quite different. An old bo'sun was reported to have said once that to be home was all right, but coming home was the very devil. And that's how it was with Jan: the nearer he got to home the more agonizing it was. When they got within the sight of land he was having a drink in the chart-room, the bottle in one hand and the glass in the other. The door of the cupboard squeaked as it swung to and fro in the swell. As he drank, the glass rattled against his teeth and he took another drink to steady his hand. There were the pilot's boots clumping on deck. There was cook's voice, saying: "Hullo, old man, how's home?" And there was the pilot's voice answering: "Morning, cook; morning, men. Welcome home."

There were the calls of the men on the foc'sle to the oarsmen in the boat: "Look who's here! How are you? Want a rope?—Hey, look out with your blooming oars—new paint!"

Where was Nellie's voice now, that should be asking: "Where's the Mate? Where is my husband?"

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The door of the cupboard swung and squeaked. On deck a voice hollered: "Mate!"

Good lord, he couldn't get his feet to move, and when they did start walking, the coward in him whimpered secretly: I don't want to, I don't want to; I don't want to go away from that cupboard. Give me another drink, just one more. I don't want to go out of the chart-room. I don't want to get off the ship!

When he climbed the stairs to the bridge with slow steps and a head that felt like a balloon, all he saw was the pilot, gabbing with Captain Siemonov, and no one else except the man at the wheel. His mind had been a blank as he climbed onto the bridge. He had only repeated to himself: Now it's going to happen, now it is happening. But nothing did happen. The pilot shook hands and said: "Hullo, Mate, welcome home."

And he answered mechanically: "Thanks, pilot."

So she was dead, she was dead! For God's sake, don't mess about—out with it! But the pilot went to the engine-room telegraph with Siemonov. He saw the man at the wheel peer at him in a curious fashion. What had been said on the bridge before he was called up?

The pilot said to Siemonov: "We hadn't expected you so soon—had the wind behind you, I suppose?" And Siemonov replied: "No, no—we just stoked her up a bit; the trip had lasted long enough."

And the pilot said: "I see." Then to the man at the wheel: "Port a little, Pete." The man at the wheel echoed: "Port a little, Pete."

And the pilot again: "Keep her so, Pete."

And the man at the wheel echoed: "Keep her so."

Of course, you idiot, Jan thought, we're early. How the devil was the girl to know that? He reprimanded himself for his foolishness by a series of inward reproaches. You're out of your mind, he told himself. Why should Nellie come out on board a cutter? Who do you think she is—the Queen? Come on, keep an eye on your work, you blithering idiot. Look at Siemonov, he hasn't got any nerves, and he's just as thirsty. "Cheers, Mr. Pilot." "Your health, Skipper." Just a blooming waste of money, taking on a pilot if you're going to set him reeling with neat vodka from a tooth-glass within five minutes of his coming aboard.

There was the jetty, with people waving on it. Little boats scudded about in its lee. Look out, you ass! Nearly went overboard that time. You and your staring! Pick up your feet, look where you're going!

Siemonov called: "Hop, hop, borother—the hawser!"

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And he hurried down aft, his ears hot with shame. What a disgrace for a Mate, to be called out of a dream by his Captain at the moment they entered port—a blooming schoolboy. He took his revenge out of the hawser, that had to be shortened for the manœuvring ahead. It was scorching hot on the poop. The sun beat down mercilessly on the black iron and sweating bodies. He stripped off his shirt and threw it behind the main bollard. The sun beat down on his naked back like a fire when he bent down to undo the springs. The big winch hissed angrily, with Stobbe at the control cock. They had to wait for a signal from the *Schouwen*, the other ship in the convoy, before they could start hauling in. Then it came. A crest of steam from the *Schouwen*'s whistle, a silence, then the long-drawn wail. Siemonov called: "Haul her home, boys!" Jan shouted: "Home!"

Stobbe opened the cock and pulled the handle, and the winch started its mad stampede. The heavy rope came coiling in, a giant snake, slimy with seaweed. They kept it amidships by forcing their chests against it. Five panting men, cursing at the slithering monster, were barely enough to keep it in check. The water poured down their backs and chests; it ran down into their trousers. Knots of seaweed flopped on deck, slithered down the rests. The winch clattered and hissed in a kind of St. Vitus's dance with Stobbe on its back, his figure blurred by the vibration.

The *Schouwen* wailed again, Siemonov shouted down: "Make fast!" and Jan repeated: "Fast!" The winch ground, gnashing, to a standstill. They struggled with the loops that had to be taken round the main bollard. As the men coiled the rope in place, Jan and Stobbe battered the loops home with sledge-hammers. Then the *Schouwen* wailed for a third time, the engine-room telegraph rang out below decks, and when the hawser was pulled tight, water spurted from it in flashing jets.

Cleaning up the part of the rope they had hauled in and tucking it home took his mind off what was happening beyond the rail, until he heard a woman scream in the distance. He looked up, panting, his arms twitching from the strain, and the seaweed dripping down his back, and saw a boat with a woman clutching the gunwale. She screamed: "Who's the flag for? Who is it? Henk! Where's Henk?"

Henky shouted from the foc'sle: "Here I am, Mum—here!"

The woman cried: "Henky! My baby!" And she sat down like a sack, laughing stupidly, trying to wave and blow her nose at the same time. Henky didn't like it, he was furious with his fat mother and yet so moved that he paced about nervously, muttering: "The silly old fool! She might have known that it was meant for the Chief Engineer, I wrote her about it."

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Jan had forgotten all about the flag, flying at half-mast. No wonder that that woman got the shock of her life. Fancy Nellie standing on shore and thinking . . .

He hurried up to the bridge, turned halfway, ashamed of his dirty body and his soaked trousers, and jumped to the deck between the stokehole ventilators. At this point he started waving his arms madly, so that she could see him if she happened to be somewhere amongst the crowd lining the river. He felt the heat of the deck through his shoes. The funnel, huge and black behind his naked, gesticulating figure, radiated a terrific heat. He waved and shouted, running from port to starboard, waving at the crowd, shouting at the rowing-boats swarming round them.

What a lot of women! How the devil was he to recognize Nellie in that crowd? He got panicky when they all started waving back and cheering and dancing in their wobbling boats. It looked as if his Nellie had hidden herself among thousands of other waving Nellies, of all shapes and sizes. And of course she'd be furious if he didn't wave back. He waved his arms above his head and shouted, " Hurray! " like everyone else on board. He waved with the shred of cotton waste that was tucked in his belt. He cried, " Hullo! Hullo! " with tears of misery running down his face. She wasn't there, she was nowhere. Yet she seemed to be everywhere. Oh lord, I wish I had been spared this, he thought. I wish we'd made that trip round the world after all.

The convoy sailed slowly up the river. To judge by the noise the people made, it was quite an event to have their men home again. The *Schouwen* had been away for seventeen months, the *Jan van Gent* nine. Where that crowd had sprung from at such short notice was a mystery; but they were obviously delighted. They cheered so loudly that Little Abel emerged from the stokehole to find out what the noise was all about. " Listen to them, the fools! " was his muttered comment. All the deck-hands stood waving at the rail and shouting, pushing, cheering, stumbling. It gave one a feeling of giddiness to watch them.

When at last the *Schouwen* had moored at the quayside and Captain Maartens went ashore, he was met by a lot of gentlemen who hung a garland rather like a funeral wreath round his neck, and then he was photographed for the papers.

Nobody understood what all this fuss was about—Maartens himself least of all; but when one of the gentlemen started making a speech, he gathered that he had made the longest towing voyage in history: he had beaten the record trip by four hundred miles. Three cheers for Captain Maartens! The gentlemen

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waved their hats in a congratulatory manner. Maartens shook hands with them all, amiably, and let himself be patted like a horse without moving a muscle in his hammy face. But the gentlemen seemed to forget that Maartens hadn't seen his wife for seventeen months, and was naturally anxious to find her.

She turned up at last, a tubby little woman with a flat hat filled with fruit. Her face was red and shiny and her white dress had smudges under the arms after all these hours of waiting in the glaring sun. The gentlemen called, "Bravo, bravo!" when Maartens bent over her to kiss her; but the wreath was in the way and so was her hat, and in the end they just shook hands awkwardly. All she could find to say was: "Hullo, dear, how are you, dear?" But the gentlemen cheered so loudly that they couldn't hear one another speak.

The longest towing venture in history still wasn't over, however. The gentlemen had their rights too. Yet another one started reading a speech from a paper. Maartens stood motionless and impassive by the side of his wife, who wasn't able to hide her own emotion any longer. She sniffed, hiding her face underneath the brim of her hat. The gentleman went on mouthing out words like "hero," "dauntless," and "immortal" over Mrs. Maartens's hat.

Sometimes he became inaudible, when a cart rattled by over the cobbles of the quay or a horse-tram shrieked round a bend. When the speech was over, Maartens shook hands with the speaker and said: "I thank you for the pleasant reception on behalf of my officers and men; it has been a pleasant ending to a pleasant trip."

When the same gentlemen said farewell to him three weeks later, at the start of a voyage with a tin-dredger to Banka, and from there to God knows where, he would express the hope, on behalf of his officers and men, that this might be the pleasant beginning of a pleasant trip. Bravo! Bravo! Bravo! This was the stuff that nautical heroes were made of.

The crew of the *Schouwen* were given leave, and filed ashore, loaded with their belongings. Several wives were quarrelling already. "Can't you look where you're going?" one mother scolded, and another mother scolded back.

Later, workmen of the wharf took possession of the ship, which had to be docked that afternoon. An engineer from the works had arrived in a launch to check up on the condition of the engine. The Chief couldn't help waiting on the ship until he had had a word with the barbarians who were about to lay their paws on his engine. When the works engineer came up the ladder he said, "I should like to warn you that the grease-cups—"

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But from the quay a woman's voice called: "Chris, Chris! Where are you? We've got to catch the 10.15!" And he hurried off with a worried face.

When he had gone, the engineer said to his foreman: "Well—I must say she doesn't look too bad, the old junk-box."

No wonder. Those piston-rods had been polished five hundred and sixteen times during the course of the trip, for Chris lavished on his beloved pistons the paternal love that his family had to go without.

The *Schouwen* was taken to the dry dock, and that afternoon she was lifted slowly out of the water, her hull covered with weed and barnacles from the seven seas, and she looked like an old sea-wall at low tide.

By this time the *Jan van Gent* was pitching home on the choppy waters of the North Sea—on her way to Helder, her home port. Jan was happy, but the rest of the crew hated it. Most of them lived in Amsterdam, and their only worry was to catch the last train from the north. Down below, in the stokehole, curses and furious scrapings and clatterings rang out all day, for the stokers were flinging as much fuel under the boilers as the furnaces could take without getting choked up. Bout, the engineer, had to check them, shouting over the din of the engine in the doorway between the stokehole and the engine-room.

"Are you out of your minds?" he yelled. "The safety-valve is blowing off."

The deck-hands, now the job was finished, were making themselves presentable for the shore; a sudden passion for cleanliness had overtaken them. They spluttered and splashed and scrubbed in the lee of the midships on the poop, stark naked and very noisy. Stobbe washed them down with the fire-hose; the heavy jet glinted in the sunlight and flattened itself into a fan of sparkling spray as it played on the back and chests of the scrubbers.

Jan, too, had himself sprayed clean by the bo'sun. The jet hammered on his chest and tore at his legs; he scrubbed and splashed, and couldn't get enough of the hard cold water. He sang out at the top of his voice until the bo'sun managed to hit him on the mouth, and made him choke.

After they'd finished, the bo'sun inspected them like a humourless matron, to make sure that there were no more dirty toes and artificial shadows in the ears. Then cook treated them to a shower of fresh water, so that their wives wouldn't pull a face at the taste of salt. The trip was over; the fresh water he had watched over like a demon for weeks ran down their faces and went to waste. After the bath, he stood them a round of farewell

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coffee; they must take a happy memory with them of the ship to which they would be coming back in a fortnight. They drank the coffee slowly, luxuriously lying naked on the hatch to let themselves be dried by the sun.

Jan gazed at the shore, his chin on his hands. There was the gap in the dunes, the big dike between Camperduin and Petten. Another hour or so, and he'd be home. He thought: Tonight I'll sleep in a bed. That was difficult to realize. He thought: Tonight I'll sleep in a bed with Nellie, and that was somehow so startling that he jumped up and ran down to his cabin to dress.

Siemonov stood on the bridge in the light of the sunset. He was happy, the ship was his once more. She was free of an alien master, obeying no one but him now. But it was not for long: already the dike between Camperduin and Petten loomed on the horizon. In an hour or so she'd be lying alongside the quay, and there'd be no one else on board except himself for days, perhaps weeks on end.

Those are the hardest moments for a sailor: to be alone with his ship. A man likes being alone with his wife, but a sailor alone with his ship feels as lonely as the grave. He looked round on the deck below to find some fiddling job to give the ungrateful dogs who seemed to think of nothing else but ratting off the ship as quickly as possible—the faithful ship that had carried them safely through all those months of hazard and hardship. There were plenty of jobs left to keep them on board one night longer, so that he'd have one night less of loneliness and silence . . .

But Little Abel saw him peering and hurried below to get his accordion. He had a lot of things to pack yet, but this was something of greater urgency. He scrambled back on deck, ran to the corner below the bridge, and started working to squeeze a song out of the accordion. The song was so nostalgic, so hauntingly Russian, that within three minutes Siemonov was spellbound like a snake. He stood gazing at the sunset, his hands clasped behind his back, his beard stuck up like a moon-attracted bear; then he started swaying to the music, humming the tune. The little charmer peered up at him and when he saw the first tears trickle down into his beard, he grinned and began singing under his breath: " We've got that train—we've got that train . . ."

In the grey evening haze a spark flashed out suddenly on the horizon. Jan saw it from his porthole and whispered to himself: The lighthouse, the lighthouse. On spotting it, they used to say, " Well, boy—it's time you filled up the log."

At that Jan used to jump down the stairs to the chart-room to light the oil lamp over the table, whistling as he went. Then, still whistling, he would take pen and ink from the cupboard and sit

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down to his task. Only when he began writing did he forget to whistle. Then, concentrating on the page in front of him, he would write such entries as: " Today after sailing at 5.30 a.m., heading for the lightship *Haaks*, we passed at 6.30 p.m. the bark *Heliade* of Norwegian nationality, which, struggling hard with a S.S.W. wind, asked us by means of the usual signals to tow her into the port of Ijmuiden . . ."

Having filled up the log, he would put the book away, and return, whistling, to the bridge—a tall fair boy with untidy hair and an old peaked cap on the back of his head—and there he would stand looking at the spark of the lighthouse and the flash of the lightship like a fiery question and answer glinting to and fro in the night. As he whistled he would think to himself: another day wasted, crawling up and down this blessed coast; when would he get out of sight of these confounded lights?

Never had that boy suspected how long, how terribly long, that little stretch of time would seem, between the first glimpse of the lighthouse and the final putting in to port, on one occasion in his life. The whole journey of sixteen thousand miles seemed nothing in comparison, a mere pleasure jaunt.

When at last he dragged his sea chest up the stairs of the mess-room and on the deck, a wave of joy overwhelmed him; mad ecstatic joy, but tinged nevertheless with an unexpected sadness—and even a lurking fear. He was sad because this journey was over for ever, and a little afraid because the arrival of the child might put a barrier between himself and Nellie, and all the old familiar things might have changed. But the most curious thing of all happened when he took Nellie's picture off its hook to pack it in his bag. He looked at the photograph which had been his inspiration and solace for nine weary months and he felt, as he put it away in his bag, as if some dear friend had died.

The *Jan van Gent* backed in against the quay. As her stern approached the wall a line was thrown ashore, and one of the beachcombers lounging about among the crates and the barrows caught it and hauled it in. When finally the loop of the mooring-rope was hitched over the bollard Jan's job was done, and he looked up. And there confronting him were Nellie, her parents Mamma Dijkmans and Father Dijkmans, and a pram. Oh hell, what a to-do they made with all their waving and beckoning! Father Dijkmans jumped up and down on the quay, the old fool, and Mamma Dijkmans waddled panting to the gang-plank, like a human jelly on the move.

But Nellie stayed where she was with the pram. She had forgotten to take her hand down when she first caught sight of him,

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after having waved at no one in particular for quite a while. There she stood, one arm in the air; and there he stood, the loose end of the rope still in his hands, and they just gaped at one another. Then suddenly he yelled, "*Sweetheart*!" and jumped over the rail like a monkey. He frightened the life out of her, his twelve-stone bulk descending on her without warning, like a bolt from the blue. She was so startled that she couldn't help making an instinctive move to protect the pram. There were tears of joy in her eyes and she was almost too moved to smile. Jan grabbed her and swung her off her feet as he caught her in his embrace.

Meanwhile, old Dijkmans stood gaping at them and seemed afraid that his daughter might be crushed to death before his eyes. He wanted to shake hands with Jan; he tried to loosen his arms to shake hands with him; he even hammered with his fist on Jan's arms and said: "Hullo, Jan! Hey! Don't you know me any more?" But Father Dijkmans couldn't get them apart.

However, something squeaked and stirred in the pram and that did the trick. Nellie took Jan by the hand and let him look in. He stammered: "By Jove, what a lovely kid!" But he was only guessing, because as it happened he couldn't see anything for tears. All he made out was an eiderdown and a tiny pillow with what looked like the top of a coconut on it. Nellie and he looked at each other, smiled, sighed, and once more embraced.

But they had to come down to earth some time, and it was Mother Dijkmans who brought them back with the sensible suggestion: "You help Jan pack his things, love. Father and I will go ahead with the baby." It seemed that she remembered the ways of lovers better than Father Dijkmans, who started to protest loudly, until she slapped her hand over his mouth and hissed an explanation in his ear.

So they went off in the sunset, with the pram wobbling over the cobbles on the quay, while Jan and Nellie stayed behind.

Jan and Nellie went on board the *Jan van Gent*. For Jan it was a solemn moment, though he couldn't quite say why. The fact was that the presence of Nellie made him incapable of any clear thinking. All he could do was to keep looking at her.

Nellie had shaken hands with Siemonov and the cook and Stobbe and Little Abel and everyone else who came shuffling hurriedly past, eager to get away. Bout popped out of the engine-room and he had to shake hands too, after he had wiped them hastily on the seat of his boiler-suit. It was funny how self-conscious Bout was with women. He grinned and coughed, and only managed to keep his end up with: "Pleased to meet you, and it has been a very nice trip, and what nice weather we have had lately, very nice."

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Then the Third Engineer arrived and made quite a stage affair of it with a courtly bow and his hundred-per-cent man-of-the-world smile. "Well, madam, bursting with joy now your husband is home, I take it?"

Poor Nellie had not got much knowledge of human nature. When she and Jan were safely in Jan's cabin she remarked: "Nice fellow, that young engineer; the fat one seems a bit silly."

Jan said: "The fat one is, bar Siemonov, the finest chap in the world; the Third Engineer is a wash-out."

"Is that so?" Nellie said. "Just fancy. Who'd have thought so at first sight?" And Jan said: "That's why you should never judge a person's character at first sight, but wait until you have got to know them a bit."

Nellie looked at him with friendly eyes. "Sorry, mister Mate. I won't do it again," she said. That was a direct invitation to a kiss; Bout came in in the middle of it, blurted out, "Sorry—" and bolted like a rabbit. Jan jumped up and opened the door again and called: "Come on, don't be silly! What do you want?"

But Bout muttered: "No, no, it's nothing," and escaped through the door to the stokehole, the odd cove.

Well, there they sat, in his empty cabin. Womanlike, she began nosing round, opening all the drawers—she whose picture had kept him company there all those months. She had got a bit fatter and her nose seemed a little out of the straight, but that was probably the fault of the picture. Curious, after all, to know your wife's picture better than your wife herself, to believe almost that the photograph is the real thing, and she only the copy.

"What's this?" she asked, holding up a pair of socks he had left behind in a drawer for the cook to throw away. He said: "Oh, a pair of socks from Rio. They are finished."

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed. "Who on earth would leave filthy things like these behind?" And she inspected them with a wrinkle in her nose.

Oh lord, oh lord, they hadn't seen each other for nine months and now, with hundreds of things to talk about, they needs must discuss a pair of dirty socks. He tried to say something. He started: "Love, Nellie, I—I . . ." But so much emotion was released by those few stammered words that he took refuge in the socks and started to tell her breathlessly where he bought them and for how much and for what purpose, and how nice a party it was, and what a wonderful view there was from the roof . . .

He babbled and babbled with her hand in his. And she listened, gazing at his eyes and mouth. The cabin got darker and

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darker. At last it had got so dark that she could hardly see him any more, and as she had only been looking, not listening, she suddenly asked with a start, "What's the time?" He hadn't the faintest idea and, after all, who would bother about the time after nine months of . . .

But she said: "I hope it isn't past ten, I've got to feed the baby!" Oh lord, the baby! Yes, of course, right you are. He struck a match to look at his watch in his waistcoat over the wash-stand, and lied: "Quarter to ten—but you *must* see the cabin with the light on."

But she couldn't sit still any longer, and that lovely humming silence with only one's own voice softly murmuring in the background had been swept away. They went out, and as Jan shut the door of the cabin, a feeling of sadness caught him unawares. Good-bye, cabin, good-bye . . .

"Come on, Jan," she said.

"Oh well—let's go." It was hopeless trying to get at the bottom of all those emotions, anyhow.

The evening didn't pass quickly; it seemed rather like the evening of their wedding-day. It was mostly Mother Dijkmans and Father Dijkmans and gossip and giggles and grilled herrings and come on, boy, tell us something, and come on, Jan, take some more. And then the showing of the child, whom Jan thought downright ugly, but whom Mother Dijkmans pronounced to be the bonniest bairn she had ever set eyes on. Mmmm, I could just eat you, though little Nellie was bonny too when she was as small as that.

The child yelled its head off, lying on the table, while its napkin was being changed. Look at those leggies just look at them, and those little thighs—oho, I could eat him, so I could! The women fussed around the child, and Father Dijkmans tried to make it grab his pipe-stem, but Mother Dijkmans chased him off. Jan had to say it was sweet and ducky and fat and healthy till his jaw ached with saying so.

After that he was allowed at last to go and lean against the door-post of the back door for a moment, to peer out into the night and relight his pipe. He was dead tired after all this fuss, much more tired than after a stiff watch at the hawser; and the swell still seemed to be under his legs; he had to lean against something to get a feeling of steadiness. Well, my friend, now you're home. Now you have got at last what you have been hankering after, all this time. You had better be truly grateful now for all the blessings Mother Dijkmans has counted for you; because if they should ever suspect that you're longing for the *Jan van*

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Gent, longing so badly that it makes you groan, they—good lord, listen to that child screaming, as if it were having a fit!

He hurried back, deeply alarmed, to find his son red and convulsed with rage in the lamplight, with a mouth as large as his head, and shrieking so piercingly that the women were hardly able to make themselves heard. But after a moment or two the tantrums passed and all was peace again.

"The little darling," Jan tactfully murmured, and hurried off again to the blissful solitude of the backyard.

When the old folk had gone and Nellie was washing the tea things in the kitchen, singing and clattering; when the child was back in its cradle, making little sucking noises and grunts—only then could he sit down in the horsehair chair, his stockinged feet on the table, and light a fresh pipe—home at last.

It was a nice room, really, he decided—high and spacious. And all those nice knick-knacks on the walls and mantelpiece—just as it was the day they married. Only the lino had been worn down a lot in so short a time; those women just barged about in their clogs as if it cost nothing. He sat with his pipe purring, and examined Nellie's housekeeping book which he had found behind the clock on the mantelpiece. How quiet it was in the house now, how cosy. Memories pervaded that little room, memories as delicate and as precious as the little crystal wineglass he had brought from Rio.

The lamplight made a kind of circular horizon line in the smoke which floated in drifting veils about the room. For nine long months that lamplight had shone on Nellie's hands while she was making little sheets, or sewing vests that wouldn't cover a man's hand, or writing in this housekeeping book.

A small black book, dog-eared and covered with smudges. He turned the pages cautiously with his hard fingers. Yes, she certainly wrote a beautiful hand. He had shown her letters to almost everybody on the ship after a month or so. Look, he had said, doesn't she write a beautiful hand? And then the others had shown their letters too, and they had compared them; and, oh well, after all that they might as well read them too.

He had read the letters of everyone on board, and he had often been amazed to find how alike they were. All of them were about the children and the weather, and the milk that had gone up a farthing a pint, and do you know about him and her? And then: Well, I must finish now, for the baker is at the door or the baby is crying or Annie has come to fetch me for the choir practice. Cheerio, dear; everybody sends their love and I hope you'll be home soon.

But not one of these women wrote such a beautiful hand as

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Nellie did, so even and flowing and with such lovely flourishes, and never a word crossed out, never a blot. Even in this little book she had written with that even, flowing hand and those elegant flourishes, although it was intended for her own eyes only and written in pencil, like a log. It was in fact a kind of housewife's log, this little book.

October 7th: bread 11 *cents; soda* 3 *cts.* When she wrote this, he was dangling in the rigging of the *Scottish Maiden.* Or perhaps he was dragging that drunken Captain to the hatch of his cabin with Kees, or battling with the splintered wheel. Funny that the woman whom he loved more than anyone else, who was really part of himself, should have been writing down half a loaf and a pound of soda, or letting the cat in.

November 12th: ½ *oz. bacon* 8 *cts.; 2 eggs* 10 *cents.* That day she had been extravagant and treated herself to pancakes and bacon, the darling. And he—let's see—he must have been walking to and fro on the bridge in the rain in the Bight of Benin, or helping Bout to haul up Siemonov, who had been too weakened by malaria to walk. The ship had been like a madhouse in that endless downpour; screams and wild howls from the foc'sle, where the men lay tossing and sweating with fever in a stench like a goat shed.

March 22nd: 44 *yds. flannel* 80 *cents.* That must have been meant for the child; she knew by then she wasn't alone any more. Perhaps little Bart had already started kicking her knitting off her lap whenever she sat down for a moment to rest, as she had described in her letter. And that was the day he sat in Rio de Janeiro, looking at the monkeys with Bout, or had been strolling with the Third Engineer under the royal palms of Botafogo.

April 18th: cough mixture 16 *cts; fever pills* 1 *guilder* 25 *cts.* Fever pills? She had never written to him that she had been ill! It made him angry; he wanted to call and ask what she had got to say for herself. But he listened to her humming in the kitchen, with a tiny tinkle every time she put down a teaspoon after drying it. Never mind, it was a long while ago, anyway. But let's see just how long she has been ill for . . . *April 23rd*—that's another hand, not nearly as beautiful; must be Mother Dijkmans's. *Butter* 24, with a blot; *Doctor* 2.50; the doctor, even! Good lord, what a touch-and-go business life was—this might just as well have read, "Hospital twenty guilders"—the book might even have stopped there. And while she lay dying, perhaps calling his name, he would have laughed just as lustily with the boys in the dark long-room of the training-ship in Valparaiso, when the couple crashed off the platform or when the red-faced officer was hit on the head.

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The thought made him so uneasy that he wanted to go and join her in the kitchen, but when he lifted his legs off the table they were so stiff that he groaned and stayed where he was, rubbing the backs of his knees. Yes, that was the price of luxury; one had to get used to everything, even sitting still.

June 5th—that was a strange page. First: *4 bowls, 86 cents. One rubber sheet, small, 50 cents; 2 yds. navel ban*—and then it stopped. The rest of the page was covered with scribbles and funny little drawings, like the ones he made himself in the rough log as he sat thinking, or had to wait until the ship settled down a bit before going on with his writing. A dot, and then a spiral round it, and at the end of the spiral a little figure with rakes for hands, and its nose on the side of its head, and then, in shaky letters, growing larger and larger: *Jan, Jan, Janjan—JAN, JAN, JANJANJANJAN.*

There was a blot as if a drop of water had fallen there; she had been dabbling about in it with her pencil, had drawn little tails out of it, and then a heavy scratch, running right off the page. What a strange page. When he looked at the next one he recognized Mother Dijkmans's writing again in ink. The entry for June 6th had been lost. The book went on with *June 7th: veal cutlets* 30 *cts. Potatoes* 12 *cts. Midwife* 7.50. *Cable Jan* 9.20. Lord, he had been more expensive than the midwife!

He sat looking at that odd page for a long time, and then turned to the last one. *July 12th.* That was yesterday. Did she know by then he was coming home? She couldn't possibly, and yet it said: *Bread* 33 *cts.* 1 *oz. Hurrays* 15 *cts.* He flicked the pages back, and saw that for over a week she had been taking three times too much bread, and every other day an ounce of Hurrays. He had had them for tea that evening: biscuits with red, white, and blue icing and "Hurray" written on them. They weren't living in a seaport for nothing. There were also biscuits with orange icing and "Cheerio" printed on them, but these weren't nearly as good.

Yes, she must have known that he would be coming home today, for the last entry in the book was: ½ *lb. flour*, 15 *cts.* 4 *eggs*, 20 *cts.* 1 *basket of raspberries*, 25 *cts.* She had known it before the others had an inkling. He remembered how his mother used to say: "My legs are so funny today, and my head's so dizzy—I bet your Dad'll be coming home tomorrow."

Raspberries, 25 *cts.* . . . He understood now why she wouldn't let him in the kitchen when he offered to help her with the washing-up. When a little later the door creaked open and she came in, shuffling cautiously, carrying a raspberry tart fresh from the oven, he was greatly surprised and said: "Well—I never!"

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with wonderful sincerity. By that time the little book was back behind the clock on the mantelpiece, exactly as it was before: upside down, with the pencil sticking out of it.

When at last she had finished fussing around with the plates and spoons, and the tart stood steaming in the lamplight with a huge corner missing, and he was picking up the crisp crumbs from his plate with his thumb, she sat down herself. She uttered a sigh of contentment and her heart was full of things that no words could express.

Jan put his open hand on the table and she laid her hand in his. "Now let me look at you," he said.

She brushed a straggling lock of hair out of her eyes with her other hand, still red and damp with the washing-up, and smiled at him. There were the eyes, the sweet earnest eyes that had haunted his memory all those months, and there was the sweet soft mouth. "Well," he said, "here we are at last, love."

She laughed and her lips trembled a little, and when she rubbed her eyes with the back of her hand, she said: "Fancy the smoke stinging like that. I'll have to get used to it again, I suppose."

They went to bed at midnight. At four o'clock in the morning he woke up; the routine of the watches hadn't got out of his system yet. It took him a little while to realize where he was, but when he heard her breathing on his shoulder he kissed her forehead, stared into the darkness for a moment, and was asleep again before he knew what had happened. When he dozed off again he dreamt he was looking up at the grey sky of the Straits of Magellan, where a swarm of white birds wheeled about, crying softly. And a sea-gull swooped down at him, screeching, then soared up again into the sky, its cry fading.

He opened his eyes and saw the early sunlight shining through the curtains. From the open kitchen door came the soft splutter of bacon frying in the pan; in the cradle the baby cooed.

He opened his arms and stretched luxuriously, as if he were lying in the sun, and as he heaved a great sigh of content, the sigh formed itself into a word: HOME.

★ ★ ★

CONSTITUTIONAL

Sir Ernest Benn had a pungent and amusing way of expressing himself which helped to keep the battle hot. I remember recording one of his definitions some time ago. It was: "Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it whether it exists or not, diagnosing it wrongly and applying it incorrectly."

Peterborough, in The Daily Telegraph

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MUSEUM PIECES

Yet may you see his bones and beak
All in the Mu-se-um

HILAIRE BELLOC, *The Dodo*

Museums offer us, running from among the buses,
A centrally heated refuge, parquet halls and sarcophaguses,
Into whose tall fake porches we hurry without a sound
Like a beetle under a brick that lies, useless, on the ground.
Warmed and cajoled by the silence the cowed cypher revives,
Mirrors himself in the cases of pots, paces himself by marble lives,
Makes believe it was he that was the glory that was Rome,
Soft on his cheek the nimbus of other people's martyrdom,
And then returns to the street, his mind an arena where sprawls
Any number of consumptive Keatses and dying Gauls.

LOUIS MACNEICE, *Museums*

Egyptian Room

"Do people reading here never sigh for an easy-chair and a footstool and a collection of comfortable, unreproachful light literature?"

"No, we are all profound students here," Stephen assured her; "when we want relaxation we come for a walk among the mummies . . ." While Stephen watched her admiringly, his brother's voice struck unexpectedly in.

"Have you discovered," he asked, addressing both the girls together with a touch of formal deference, "that there is a Greek astray among the Egyptian mummies?"

"I have never discovered much here except the way to lose myself," Rhoda informed him. "Do you know him, Una?"

"No," answered Una thoughtfully, "the mummies depress me a little, there is such a weight of dust and ashes and materialism in them."

"Ah, but Artemidorus is alive still—pathetically," declared Stephen, promptly catching at his brother's thought. He led the way with that quick, swinging step of his, round corners and upstairs to the second Egyptian Room. The heavily-moulded, harshly-hued faces in the mummy cases stared dumbly down, rigid in a dead denial of death; a few were time-darkened, some were gilded masks, the bright changeless features set in an archaic smile. And in the centre of the room were the mummies themselves, swaddled, shapeless things in mouldering cerements, an

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amulet still glittering on the breast, where reverent fingers had placed it, perhaps when the stone dust still lay fresh beneath the carvings on the Temple of the Sun Gods or the Hall of Columns. Amid all this array . . . Stephen pointed to a case glowing with vermilion and gold. On the flat lid of this is painted in dim, fading lines the head of a youth, about whose throat show the simple statue-like folds of a white Greek garment, and who wears a delicate wreath of gold on his curling hair. Very appealing the beautiful young Hellenic countenance looks out, estranged and remote, among the uncouth, significant designs of Anubis, Isis, and Thoth.

DORA GREENWELL MCCHESNEY, *London Roses: an Idyll of the British Museum*, 1903

Caesar, The Ladies, and The Museum

I have a harp in my hand,
And with my voice I shout, Where do you go bright ladies?
The ladies have wings on their toes.

Out of the museum I saw Julius Caesar
Stalk in the midst of the ladies of Rome.
What are you doing here? said the bright ladies.

I have come looking for a bright scorpion, said Caesar,
For a stinging beast which . . .
Oh, you will not find one here, said the young ladies.

What use then are the ladies,
And what use then is the thing that stings to Caesar?
It is only of use to ladies with wings on their toes.

Let us all go into the British Museum
And hunt among the dusty relics for something
The ladies are not there at all.

NICHOLAS MOORE, *The Glass Tower*

On the Shelf

There are several persons in a state of imbecility who come to read in the British Museum. I have been informed that there are several in that state who are sent there by their friends to pass away their time. I remember there was one gentleman who used to blow his nose very loudly every half-hour. I inquired who he was, and I was informed that he was a mad person sent there by his friends; he made extracts out of books, and puddled away his time there.

THOMAS CARLYLE, 1795-1881

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Civic Pride

The Municipal Museum in Ghost Street was rarely, if ever, thronged, especially after noon. "You can have the key," the wife of the custodian said, "If you want it. But there's nothing whatever inside." And the assertion, sometimes, would spare her husband the weariness of struggling into a pair of black and silver trousers and vague historic tunic that was practically a tea. For in Ashringford, the Corporation, like a diver in a tank, was continually plunging back into the past.

"Since it pleases visitors to catch a last glimpse of this vanishing England," the Mayor had said, "*and if Stratford can;* why . . .!" And after the customary skirmishing of the Board, and reconciliatory garden-party, a theatrical tailor had been beckoned to, from Covent Garden, who had measured half the town.

RONALD FIRBANK, *Vainglory*

Unnatural History

I thought that I would like to see
The early world that used to be,
That mastodonic mausoleum,
The Natural History Museum.
Newspaper full of physicists,
I dropped my head upon my fists.
On iron seat in marble bower,
I slumbered through the closing hour.
At midnight in the vasty hall
The fossils gathered for a ball.
High above notices and bulletins
Loomed up the Mesozoic skeletons.
Aroused by who knows what elixirs,
They ground along like concrete mixers.
They bowed and scraped in reptile pleasure,
And then began to tread the measure.
There were no drums or saxophones,
But just the clatter of their bones,
A rolling, rattling carefree circus
Of mammoth polkas and mazurkas.
Pterodactyls and brontosauruses
Sang ghostly prehistoric choruses.
Above the megalosauric wassail
I caught the eye of one small fossil.
Cheer up, old man, he said, and winked—
It's kind of fun to be extinct.

OGDEN NASH, *The Private Dining-Room*

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ECHOING STAIR

How could he tell anyone about his gossamer adventure

by DANA BURNET

THE stairs from the subway to the street were getting longer. Or so it seemed to Henry Whipple, who had been climbing them for the past twenty years. Of course, a man tended to slow down as he got older, but Henry didn't feel older; and he'd kept his weight in hand. Henry's stomach was as flat, his round face as smooth, his hair as uniformly brown as it had been at eighteen, when he'd first come to New York from the Pennsylvania orphanage which had been his only home.

Yet now he found himself puffing when he reached the top of the three stone flights. Also, it took him a good ten seconds longer than it used—he had timed himself—to climb them. So Henry imagined—he had a powerful imagination—that the subway staircase must have mysteriously stretched, because nothing about him had changed. And certainly, there had been no other variation in his week-day schedule.

He still rose religiously at 7 a.m., breathed deeply for three minutes, then spent twelve minutes shaving and bathing. From 7.15 to 7.35 he cooked and ate his frugal breakfast. Then he washed the dishes and made his divan bed, finishing these chores at 7.55 a.m.

Next he smoked a cigarette and read his morning paper, merely glancing at the headlines to see whether the world was still intact, then lingering over the theatrical news, the gossip columns, and finally the sports pages. His visits to the theatre were rare, he never dined at any of the restaurants mentioned by the fashionable columnists.

He found it more satisfying, somehow cosier, and much cheaper, to keep abreast of current history by reading about it or listening to it on his radio. As for television, he shrank from the thought of it. The very idea seemed an intrusion on that private world which he had built up from his own independent imagination and in which he lived quite contentedly, with his memory of Katy Clement enshrined at the centre of it.

At 8.30 a.m. Henry left his one-room flatlet on East 87th Street, walked to the subway station at 86th and Lexington

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Avenue and took the express to Grand Central. Getting off there, he had actually three flights of stairs to climb to the street: one to the upper platform, a short flight to a still higher level, and then—the long ascent that he always thought of as *the* stairs. They led to an exit on Park Avenue, from which point it was only a short walk to his office at Madison Avenue and 40th Street.

Henry Whipple was head book-keeper in the mail-order department of the Fishbacher File and Cabinet Company, dealers in Superior Office Equipment. He had never worked anywhere else, he liked his fellow employees, and he silently worshipped his boss, President Fishbacher, who had personally hired the untried lad from the orphanage because he'd been impressed by what he saw in Henry's round, ingenuous face.

Mr. Fishbacher admired reliability above all other human characteristics and he'd never had reason to doubt his judgment that Henry was *reliable*. So Henry's working life was a happy one. Indeed the only threat to his general contentment—if it could be called a threat—was the fact that this summer he had begun to puff as he climbed the subway stairs.

They had played quite a part in his life, those stairs. For it was on them—on the third step going up, to be exact—that he had encountered his romance.

It had happened twenty years ago, on a stifling hot summer day, when Henry had just turned twenty-five. As a birthday present, he had got a rise from Mr. Fishbacher, so in spite of the heat in the subway that morning, he was feeling quite buoyant as he approached the foot of the stairs.

Just ahead of him was a girl, apparently carrying in her arms some object that Henry couldn't see. She had on a pale yellow dress, her yellow hair hung down in a long bob to her shoulders, and there was a kind of cool golden air about her that instantly caught Henry's attention. But what caught his heart was that she looked so frail—frail enough to dissolve, as a figure made of spun sugar might dissolve, in that steaming underground passage. Her feet and ankles seemed too small, her hips too slender, her tiny waist and sloping shoulders too delicate, to hold her own goldenness together, much less support the weight of whatever it was that she was carrying.

Henry hurried. He mounted the first step just behind her. On the second step they were side by side, and he saw that she was carrying a flowerpot, quite a large one, wrapped in newspaper. In the pot was a robust geranium with a single pink blossom that seemed to nod to him.

On the third step the girl stopped and inhaled deeply. Her

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face was very pale and her childish bosom rose and fell under the thin fabric of her dress. Then her eyes, dark blue and enormous, slanted up at Henry. There was no coquetry in them, and no appeal; she seemed merely surprised to see him standing there. For he had stopped, too, and for an instant the morning tide of people flowed around them, each face turning to stare at the girl with the flower.

"Let me carry that for you," Henry said; and took the heavy pot away from her. Their hands touched, and a strange delight blossomed, as bright as the geranium, in his heart.

"Oh," the girl said.

She walked up the stairs beside him. At the top, when he gave her back the pot, she said in a low, embarrassed voice, "Thank you."

Henry didn't puff in those days. He had full control of his breath and wanted to use it to express the sudden happiness that had blossomed within him. But before he could speak, she had turned and was walking south on Park Avenue.

"You're welcome," he called after her.

Then, because his own course lay in that direction, he followed her. But he stayed behind her, not wanting her to think he was pursuing her, and wanting with a strange intensity to pursue her. Then, abruptly, she turned into the Architects' Building at the corner of 40th Street.

Henry glanced into the entrance of the building as he passed it. The girl with the flowerpot was just entering an elevator. He sighed deeply, turned west on 40th Street, and walked, in a mood of dense melancholy, to his office on Madison. Could a man, he wondered, fall in love on such slender acquaintance?

That night he dreamt of the girl with the geranium. Except that now there was no geranium. There was just that shimmering, thin figure standing somewhere high above him. Then he saw that she was waiting for him at the top of the subway stairs, and as he climbed up towards her, he could see her hair shining in the light from the street. She held out her hands to him as he came up, breathless, from the subterranean gloom.

The next morning, getting off the train at Grand Central, the dream was still vivid in his mind—so vivid that when he came to climb the stairs and saw her standing at the top of them, he hardly knew whether he was awake or still dreaming. It was utterly incredible; the more so because somehow he knew that she was waiting for him even before her face lit up at the sight of him.

"Oh," she said, "I guessed right! I thought maybe if I waited here I'd see you again."

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Henry stared at her, swallowed a lump in his throat and said, "You wanted—" he swallowed a second time—"to see me?"

"Yes, and I thought maybe you used this same exit every day, at the same time, just as I do, so I—I came early and waited," she said; and for the first time he noticed that her face, which yesterday had been so pale, was stained with a persistent rosy blush. "But maybe you don't remember me!"

"The girl with the geranium," Henry said. He added boldly, "I dreamt about you last night."

"Well, that's funny, because I couldn't sleep last night and I began thinking about you. I realized that I hadn't thanked you half enough for carrying my plant up the stairs, and I knew I must have looked awfully silly—"

"You looked beautiful."

The dark blue eyes searched his and made some discovery that caused them to waver and look down. "You see, I always have plants at home. I love them, and I wanted one in my office, so yesterday I just picked up that geranium and—"

"Let's walk along, shall we?" Henry said. He took her arm and they started up the gentle slope toward 40th Street. "You work in the Architects' Building, don't you? I saw you go in."

"Yes, I'm a secretary for the World-wide Office Furniture Company."

"Why, they're competitors of ours! I'm with the Fishbacher File and Cabinet Company, on Madison."

"Oh yes, I know that name."

"Well," he said, looking down at her, "speaking of names, mine's Henry. Henry Whipple."

"I'm Katy Clement."

"Katy," he repeated softly.

They reached her building and stopped in front of it. But Henry still held her arm. "Katy, where do you have lunch?"

"Lunch? Oh, I usually go to a little delicatessen—right over there—across Park Avenue."

"What time?"

"Oh, about twelve-thirty."

"It's a date," he said.

"You mean you'll be there?"

"Yes," he said. "Then we can talk, and I'll tell you my dream."

She put one hand to her flushed cheek. "I'd like to hear it."

He was suddenly concerned about her high colour. "Are you all right?" he asked, with an anxiety that at once established a new intimacy between them. "You look as though you might have a fever."

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" Oh, I'm getting one of those horrid summer colds, I think. But it's nothing. I'll take some aspirin and—" She smiled at him. " It's nice of you to worry about me. But don't."

" I'll see you at lunch, then."

" Yes," she said. " Yes—Henry."

" Katy! " he said; and turning, walked rapidly away.

At twelve-thirty sharp he was sitting in a booth at the rear of the delicatessen, waiting for Katy. A girl came in, a rather plump, dark-haired girl, and walked slowly down the aisle between the booths. She seemed to be looking for someone. When she saw Henry she hesitated, then stopped.

" Are you Mr. Whipple? "

" Yes."

" Well, I'm—my name's Maria Marchus and I'm a friend of Katy Clement's. I work in the same office with her. She—"

" Something's happened to her! "

" She was sent home ill this morning. She said she had a date with you and asked me to come here and try to find you."

" Is she seriously ill? "

" I don't know. Katy isn't very strong—" Maria stopped, seeing the look on Henry's face.

" Could you give me her telephone number? You see, I've only just met her and—"

" Well, I could. But she lives in a boarding-house in Brooklyn, and the phone's downstairs in the hall."

" I see," Henry said. He drew out his wallet, and took from it one of his business cards. " Will you give her this when she comes back to the office, and ask her to ring me? "

" Certainly, I'll be glad to," Maria said.

Afterwards, he could never remember how long it was, how many blank days went by before the telephone call came. When it did, the choked voice on the wire was that of Katy's friend, Maria.

" I'm so terribly sorry, Mr. Whipple. I don't know how to— It was virus pneumonia and—"

" She's dead, isn't she? "

" How did you know? "

" Because you're crying," Henry said.

But somehow he had known from the beginning, from the moment he had first caught sight of Katy's frail golden figure in the subway.

" I just thought I ought to let you know," Maria's uncertain voice said.

" Yes. Thank you," Henry said. He put down the receiver. He was sitting at his desk in his office and beside him stood his young assistant, Ken Metzger, with an open ledger in his hands.

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" Mr. Whipple! You've had some bad news? "

Henry looked up at Ken. " I—it's just something personal. A personal matter." He pointed to the ledger. " You wanted to go over some accounts, I believe."

But that afternoon Mr. Fishbacher himself sent for Henry. As usual, the book-keeper felt mutely reverential in the presence of his employer and was a little awed as always by the President's spacious office, with its old-fashioned golden-oak panelling, its huge polished desk, and elephantine horsehair sofa on which Mr. Fishbacher, a big man, took his post-luncheon naps.

" Henry, I was sorry to hear you had a disturbing telephone call this morning. I don't want to pry into your private affairs, but if you've suffered a—a loss, and there's anything I can do—"

" Why, thank you, Mr. Fishbacher."

" Or maybe you'd rather not talk about it."

Henry was quite willing to talk to the man who had befriended him, who had taken the place in his thoughts of the father he'd never known. But how could he tell anyone, even Mr. Fishbacher, about his gossamer adventure that had ended almost before it had begun?

" The call was from the friend of a girl I knew—a girl named Katy."

" Were you in love with her, Henry? With this girl named Katy? "

" Yes, sir, I was," Henry said; and knew now that this was true.

" Well," the big man said, " I think a lot of you, as I'm sure you know. You're a reliable man, and that's the highest compliment in my book. If you'd like to take some time off—just go away for a while and try to forget . . ."

" Oh no, Mr. Fishbacher, thank you. I'll be all right. I mean, I'd much rather stay right here and go on with my work. With my regular life."

" You don't have many outside interests or—er—much excitement in your life, do you, Henry? "

" I don't care for excitement, sir," Henry said. " As for interests, I have all I need."

" Well," Mr. Fishbacher said, " you're sure you wouldn't like to take a holiday? With pay, of course."

" No, sir. But thank you very much for—" Henry paused and looked across the gleaming desk at his benefactor— " for everything."

" That's all right, Henry. Now try not to brood. It isn't good for a man."

" No, sir," Henry said.

He didn't brood. He didn't really grieve over the lost reality

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of his romance, for he found that it had released his power to love. It did not matter to him—it seemed all the more perfect—that he was in love with a memory as sheer as vanished sunlight.

From that time on, Henry Whipple began to live almost exclusively in the world of his imagination.

But, of course, Henry had to go on climbing the subway stairs. They were growing like the beanstalk in the fable, getting longer, higher, steeper. Sometimes they seemed almost to touch the patch of sky he could see above the tall buildings as he laboured stubbornly upwards. Yet in spite of his increasing shortness of breath and an occasional sharp pain in his side, it never occurred to him to give up this habit which was also an act of devotion. For he could always visualize the figure of Katy waiting for him at the top of the flight.

The dream he'd had then had become his religion, his faith, the great hope that cancelled out any fear he might have had of dying. He was sure, though he never quite admitted it to himself, that some day he would die on the subway stairs, but he wasn't afraid, because deep inside him was the conviction that his love would be waiting for him when he made the inevitable, final ascent.

One hot summer morning, after a particularly hard battle with the stairs, Henry barely managed to get to the office. There he staggered into his own department, groped his way past Ken Metzger's desk, and collapsed in his own chair. Ken rushed to him, found him unconscious but still breathing, and ran out to give the alarm.

They carried Henry into Mr. Fishbacher's office and laid him on the President's big shiny black sofa. Mr. Fishbacher had already sent for his own doctor, who arrived in a surprisingly short time. So everything was done that could humanly be done, and the office staff filed silently out of the room. Ken Metzger, the last to go, closed the door behind him.

The doctor listened briefly to Henry's heart. Then he straightened up, looked at Mr. Fishbacher, and shook his head.

"No chance?"

"None."

"Maybe if we got him to a hospital?"

"No. It'll be only a matter of minutes, I think."

Mr. Fishbacher walked over to the sofa and said, "Henry?"

The dying man's lips moved. "The stairs are so long—so high I can't climb them."

"Henry," Mr. Fishbacher said, "there aren't any stairs. You don't have to—"

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"But I must," the faint voice said, "because she's there, waiting."

"Just be quiet," Mr. Fishbacher said. "Try to rest."

"Yes, I see her now," Henry said in so normal a tone that Mr. Fishbacher started back and turned to the doctor; then he heard Henry cry out, "Katy!"

The doctor stepped forward, looked down, and said, "He's gone."

Mr. Fishbacher walked over to a window and stood there with his back to the room. After a moment he said, "Henry was in love once with a girl named Katy."

The doctor didn't answer.

"I don't understand about the stairs," Mr. Fishbacher went on, "but they must have meant something to him. You heard what he said, about having to climb them because she was waiting for him?"

"Yes," the doctor said.

"You think it means anything? That is, do you think he really—?" Mr. Fishbacher left his question hanging in the air.

The doctor said, a trifle wearily perhaps, but gently, "Human beings in extremis often have hallucinations just before the end."

"Hallucinations?" Mr. Fishbacher turned quickly. "That's your opinion, doctor. Now I'll tell you what I think."

"Yes?" the doctor said.

"I think that if Henry said there were stairs, then there were stairs. I think if he said that a girl named Katy was waiting for him, then a girl named Katy was waiting for him." Mr. Fishbacher lifted his fist, with the handkerchief still clutched in it, and shook it as though in defiance of all earthbound reason. "And I'll tell you why I think so."

"Why?" asked the doctor.

"Because," Mr. Fishbacher said, "Henry Whipple was a very reliable man."

★ ★ ★

IN NEXT MONTH'S ARGOSY

H. E. BATES

RAY BRADBURY

JOHN WYNDHAM

MICHAEL GILBERT

★

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PALOMINO

The red sun tipped the stallion's mane with fire

by CECILIA DABROWSKI

THE alien metal of the curb bit ground harshly against his teeth. Resenting it, the stallion reared, jerking savagely at the rope that tethered him to the post. His great forehoofs pounded the dry earth into little puffs of dust that drifted sullenly away on the hot midday wind. Flattening his ears, he twisted his head, snake-like, and seized the rope in his teeth—crushing it in the large strength of his jaws—the muscles of his lean head bulging.

From far away on the wind the sound of a shrill wild whinny reached him. The stallion ceased his fractious movements and for one second became a golden, dappled statue. Then, in answer, he screamed his challenge with all the force of the giant bellows of his lungs, and all the long bitter yearning of his savage heart was in it.

He reared again, snorting. His was not the playful, mimic anger of the overfed thoroughbred—it was the cruel hatred of the wild for all things that infringed their liberty.

Sixteen hands he stood—sixteen hands of lithe, cruel perfection and of never-ending malice. The blood that flowed through him was almost pure Arab but the heart that pumped it had long ago been given lessons in wild cunning; given to the long quietnesses of the plains and the slender rifts of valleys folded in sleep.

The great horse stood immobile. Through his mane the wind thrust its fingers in a long white ripple along the arched crest of his neck—and it whirled the strands of spun silver that were his tail. The dapples of his golden body gleamed in sullen glory as he stood in sleek perfection, like a leopard at bay.

His tiny ears pricked, listening to the call of the trees as they made obeisance to the wind, and in their odd, ineffable voices, he heard lost, muted things that fawned upon his ear—the cry of his vanished freedom.

Spurred by the sense of impending desolation, the stallion flung his dappled body upwards, rearing until his head was perpendicular to the earth beneath him. Once more his hoofs

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thundered down upon the dust and he called once—a great shrill scream that burst up from his lungs and the yearning of his fear-filled heart.

The flaring nostrils, distended in the soft golden muzzle, showed pink as the stallion caught the scents from the summer heat around him; the scents of the clover in the field beyond the stout railing, and the drying hay, as the wind whipped in and out of the even rows that had fallen from the mower; the smell of leather and harness and the things that are fetters for the beasts of God.

Sometimes, faintly, barely discernible, there came a small gust of wind straight from the open plains, uncloyed, and bitter-sweet to his captive heart. Beyond that there was the scent of the sea, filled with salt and harsh to land-bred nostrils.

If ever he ran again as he used to run, in the thundering glory of the sound of his own hoof-beats, the stallion knew he would run from the sea—flee from the calling coolness of its depths and the wild fretting of its own white horses. He would run with the slenderness of his body close to the earth, feeling its solidity beneath him.

Deep in his brain was the terrifying impression of the coastal sands as they had been the day the wild herd had fled for miles along the shore, seeking to turn back through the sand-hills and thence to the flats. The waiting riders had blocked them in startling relays of horsemen in the dunes.

Trembling, he could hear again the shrill, fearful neighing of the two trapped mares as the quicksands, in rapid treachery, engulfed them.

Rearing on the edge of them, he had sensed the grains of the hideous body pressing and grinding together in suction beneath the force of the tide as it flirted towards them with a long, deathless hiss, driving towards the sand-hills. Sensing the nearness of the riders, he had leapt forward in the quaking sand, goaded by a hatred of the men behind that was stronger than the fear of the sands ahead.

Then he had become panic-stricken, thrashing madly in terror as he felt the pull of the sands embracing him, their tenuous clasp about his knees. With the strength that comes only from great terror he had reared, jerking his forelegs free, and crashed over on his side. The glory of his long white mane lay like an edge of foam across the sand, as the exhausted breath rasped in his throat.

He heard the thud of the riders' boots as they leapt onto the sand—the shadow of the foremost was flung across him.

Even as his hind legs came free of the sands and he rolled over,

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the rope sang above him and dropped over them. As he began to thrash again he felt the steady pull on them as he began to move back across the sands.

He struggled to get to his feet.

Another rope landed neatly over his forelegs and he was forced to stay on his side. Sharply, he was jerked free by the concerted strength of the three other horses. The fourth rope was placed round his neck, making him captive for ever.

Trembling, the stallion remembered the sea.

Suddenly alerted, he swung his head up, snorting, towards the gate. It swung wide beneath the pressure of the strong blunt hand upon it. The man came walking slowly towards the stallion. Over his arm he had slung a saddle and cloth, and in his hand he carried a whip. His voice was gentle and soft when he spoke, like the voice of one bemused by his own affection for the beauty before him.

The stallion flattened his ears—the rolling whites of his eyes gleamed—he shifted his weight nervously from one leg to the other. The dust rose up in irresolute puffs from beneath his hoofs—he neither advanced nor gave ground.

The man came on, putting his feet down gently like a stalking cat, as though he was not a human being at all. He reached the quivering stallion and ran a firm hand down the gleaming neck. Warily he placed the cloth and saddle on his back. With infinite care he cinched the girth tight, and slowly undid the rope from the bridle.

As suddenly as the rage had splintered within him before, it seemed to leave the stallion. Somewhere within his brain the calm faith in man of his Arab forebears had reasserted itself, and he now with joyless passiveness allowed himself to be mounted. He no longer wanted to kill this man, though he felt no particular desire to obey him.

Long generations of service lay in his breeding, even in his wild heart a little of it flickered yet, holding him subdued and oppressed.

Firmly gripping the reins so that the curb was barely felt, the man urged the stallion forward. Reluctantly the great dappled horse stepped away—he had had lessons in obedience before and wanted no more of them.

For an hour, in precise response to given commands, he obeyed mechanically and launched his tawny body over the brush hurdles and jumps at which the man set him. Then, sharply, his rider turned him towards the bar that was placed at six feet. The stallion rolled a nervous eye at it, half rearing before he

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began to run. He almost baulked, then gathering himself, he rose up like legendary Pegasus, and under pressure of the rider's feet and knees, and the balancing reins, peculiar confidence filled him and he leapt powerfully over—a brilliant, dappled god of the earth.

Landing with barely a jar, he ran effortlessly the length of the field, coming to an easy, obedient halt.

The blunt, clever hands patted his shining neck where the sweat was just starting. The gentle voice caressed him, as long ago the Arab voices had caressed the cosseted mares of his line. The stallion, with ears pricked, seemed to be listening.

That night he paced the length of the yard—savage under the stars and the scents of the night wind. With every wild pulse of his heart, the hatred of his bondage became deeper. He reared, striking at the thick wooden railings with his forehoofs. They shuddered beneath the impact, but gave not an inch. The stallion backed fiercely away as though calculating their height. Then with fearful pounding of his hoofs, he ran at them—suddenly defeated, he turned and lashed at them with his hind legs until they groaned beneath the force of his fury.

Then, at last, he stood quietly back, his great golden head drooping in subjection, barely heeding the weeping call of the winds from the plains.

The dawn came into the sky and the stallion raised his head, perhaps knowing in his heart, with uncanny animal prescience, what it would bring for him. He began to watch the stirrings of life around him. A bird fluttered upwards, its wings beating like silver fans against the rising sun. It touched the topmost branch of the tree, folded its wings, and cried out loudly into the mouth of the sunrise.

Behind him, the wind leapt up and threw the loose straws of hay swirling about his fetlocks. He heard the barking of the cattle dogs from the distant farms, herding the cows. The red sun tipped his mane with fire—he faced it, moving uneasily on his feet.

The shadows from the gum trees were just beginning to shorten in the oppressive heat of the late morning, when the man came into the yard again. Suddenly antagonized by his presence, the stallion bared his teeth, twisting his angry head, and leapt towards him. But there, between them, lashed the slender, wicked plait of the whip, and the big horse subsided again like a cowed dog.

The bridle was slipped over his head after the rope had been fastened around his neck. The hard straight bit was rubbed

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almost savagely against his teeth till he opened his mouth—for he had angered the man who sought only to gentle him.

A few moments more and the weight settled onto his back. He knew, with his rider firmly settled, he should move away, but today he knew he would not. He bunched his muscles beneath him, but his rider was ready for him, and the following buck failed to unseat him.

Squealing with rage, the stallion then raced for the walls of the yard to crush this hated burden against them, but against his will he was turned, as the hideous pressure of the curb prepared to break his jaw. He pounded to a savage halt. The foam flew as he ground his teeth on the bit, hatred quivering within him with every beat of his heart. Resentfully he obeyed the commands of knee and rein, and stepped sullenly out into the training paddock.

Out across the field he ran, each savage thrust of his great quarters imbued with malignancy. The sunlight gleamed upon him in sullen strips through the thunderclouds and the sea-gulls flew inland, crying of the storm. The tumult within his savage heart seemed to be reflected in the whole world as he ran in splendid, thundering flight. Under pressure of the bit he halted, snatching sideways at it—rolling the whites of his eyes in ugly animal impatience. The foam flew from his mouth, bespeckling his chest with white scuds.

His rider sat him like a centaur, without fear, but watchful lest that lean head twist and the champing mouth seize his foot. He smiled to himself, oddly tender, as one might when trying to teach a wilful child—giving it full credit for the depths of its obstinacy.

Leaping with sullen brilliance, the stallion cleared the hurdles, and then the bar set at six foot three. As he pounded to a halt, his rider was suddenly tempted to raise the bar another three inches.

He dismounted, and thrust it up to the six-foot-six mark; then he walked the horse cautiously round it, turned him, and rode him the length of the field away.

Gaining speed and impetus, the stallion raced for the jump; launching himself high like a bright dappled flame, he cleared it without effort.

The hard training he had received in the school of the wild would stand in his favour for ever. Landing with a grunt, he continued to run fast towards the high fence of the training paddock. His rider hesitated visibly, then leaning forward a little, gave him his head.

The fence measured seven foot six to the topmost strand of the taut, shining erection. Without faltering, in great measured

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strides, the stallion came towards it, and without a flicker of uncertainty he rose up, hung a moment suspended above it, and landed with a jarring impact on the other side. Exultantly, the man knew that here was a champion with breeding enough to be eligible in any show-ring. Equipped with all a wild stallion's stamina and skill, he was without parallel.

Once over the fence and into the long paddock, where the polled station cattle grazed to the cliff edge by the sea, the stallion settled into his stride. His rider made no move to check him, thinking to let him run until he was ready to stop.

On and on the stallion ran—behind him rolled the vicious, sullen thunder of his hoofs in flight. His long dappled body flattened itself close to the earth as he ran—the beat of his hoofs measuring every stride with the beat of his heart. The hated scent of the sea burnt in his nostrils, but nothing could stop the giant pounding of his hoofs now. He was running as never before. The freedom of the wide earth beat in his breaking, captive heart.

Suddenly he knew that there was freedom from the unbearable things of this world only in death, and straight as an arrow, he ran for the sea.

As he ran, all his old hate poured back into him. It burnt in his animal brain, unrelenting and bitter. It was savage with the knowledge that he would never embrace freedom again—it was all-encompassing—it grew with every forward thrust of the great, golden flanks.

The man riding suddenly sensed the change in the stallion—he was running as though possessed—there was strange purpose in this headlong flight to the sea. He began to pull on the reins, certain of the cruel bit breaking this thundering run. Not until then did he realize the frantic mouthings of the stallion had found a flaw in the metal and snapped it like a blade of grass. It left him powerless to stop the horse, but it would not be the first broken bit he had known.

The stallion ran on. Before them the fence that skirted the cliff edge came into sight. His rider, guessing with a kind of bitter sadness that nothing could now break the stallion's last run, kicked his feet free from the stirrups, and wondered how a man might land on that hard earth that seemed to be rushing beneath them.

He unfastened the whip from the saddle in case the stallion should halt after he leapt off, and come back to maul him. As he unfastened it, he wondered if he could possibly divert the stallion with a blow across the nose. Madly the whip cracked above the

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stallion's head. The tip of it bit into his muzzle. Frantically the big horse rolled the whites of his eyes, but never faltered in his stride. Again the whip cracked, and this time the blow caught him brutally just below his eyes. The tautness of his outstretched neck never relaxed. His rider could see the red, flaring nostrils distended to their utmost. The stallion continued to run.

The man, intent upon his endeavour, had failed to note the distance of the fence. With hideous suddenness it loomed before them. In despair, he felt the horse gather himself for the leap. And then he launched himself up over the five-foot fence. As he did so, his rider saw the tiny nine-foot strip of land beyond the fence and was oddly conscious of the Pohutukawas flaming in indifferent gaiety along the cliff-top. He could hear the sea snarling softly along the base of the cliff.

Then, even as he hung in mid-air above the fence, the stallion turned his body; twisting, cat-like, with terrible adroitness, he landed inconceivably safe upon the narrow strip of land. Quickly his rider flung himself from the saddle. Standing at the great horse's head, he caressed him.

Then the stallion felt again the upsurge of hate within him. Blindly the disproportionate desire to kill this thing in front of him rose uppermost. It was all around him, clashing like thunder in his ears, crawling in slow shudders through his rearing, tawny body—he felt himself pulsing with it. He pawed the air and one great forehoof smashed against the shoulder of the man, felling him with that blow, draping him across the wires of the fence.

The tawny thoroughbred squealed and began to leap forward, but even as he leapt, the ground beneath his hoofs trembled and began to slide. First his hind legs began to slip.

He reared again and was silhouetted there, stark with the livid red of his foaming mouth squealing in terror as he heard the thundering of the sea's white horses far below him. The terror of it and foreknowledge burst within his brain and he began to slide over the edge.

A power destroyed by his own brute hatred, he was magnificent even as he fell—with the brilliant storm sun on his flying mane and tail, and the fierce dark dapples twisting over and over as he went down.

There was a brief space when he seemed not to be falling at all—as though he was a thin bright spark of colour against the waters, and then he went for ever to the savage, unrelenting hold of the sea.

The man who had loved him beyond all the creatures of this

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world, stirred a little, and with the torpid movements of one horrified to the depths of his being, slowly climbed over the fence, away from the few crumbling inches of soil left on the cliff edge.

He placed his hand on the gigantic hurt that was his shattered shoulder. Slowly he stumbled away, his drooping body poignant with defeat.

He went as one uncertain for ever of the rights of man over the dominion of the beasts of the earth.

★ ★ ★

GARDENERS

Gardeners are good. Such vices as they have
Are like the warts and bosses in the wood
Of an old oak. They're patient, stubborn folk.
Patient, as needs must be whose craft it is
To tutor wildness, making war on weeds.
With slow sagacious words and knowing glance
They scan the sky, do all that mortals may
To learn civility to pesty birds
Come after new green peas, cosset and prune
Roses, wash with lime the orchard trees,
Make sun-parlours for seedlings. Patient, yes.
And stubborn too no less, having to match
Their wits against Dame Nature's wantonness:
Her promises like piecrust easy broke
They tell you, and a man needs all he knows
To get upsides with her.
To patient, stubborn,
Add cunning next, unless you'd put it first;
For while to dig and delve is all their text
There's cunning in their fingers to persuade
Beauty to bloom and riot to run right,
Mattock and spade, trowel and rake and hoe
Being not tools to learn by learning rules
But extra limbs these husbands of the earth
Had from their birth. Of malice they've no more
Than snaring slugs and wireworms will appease,
Or may with ease be drowned in mugs of mild.
Wherefore I say again, whether or no
It is their occupation makes them so,
Gardeners are good. Gardeners are good in grain.

GERALD BULLETT

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SPELLBOUND

I learnt the trick from a sing-song girl in Hong Kong

by ARTHUR GORDON

EXCUSE me, sir, I see that you are smoking—could you possibly spare a cigarette? We are not allowed to have them here. A wise rule, no doubt, in the majority of cases. Lunatics should never be trusted with fire.

But believe me, sir, I don't belong in this place with all these crazy people. Really, I don't! I'm as sane as anyone, as sane as you are. But there you sit in your parked car, free to come and go as you please. And here am I behind these bars . . .

Oh, please don't go away! Don't drive off just because I am talking to you. I won't cause you any embarrassment. Not the slightest. I won't even ask you again for a cigarette.

I suppose you're waiting for someone. Your wife? A friend, perhaps? One of the doctors who works here in the asylum? It doesn't matter. If I see anyone coming, I'll stop talking. I'll go away from the window. But until then, please stay. You don't know what it means to be able to talk like this to somebody on the outside. Somebody who will listen, somebody who might even believe . . .

No, that's too much to expect, of course. But tell me, sir, do I *sound* like a madman? Is there anything irrational in the way I talk? My mind is as good as it ever was; truly, it is. I can solve a problem in trigonometry for you, or recite one of Shakespeare's sonnets. But, when I try to tell the truth, they won't believe me. Sir, you're a gentleman, that's obvious. You have the sympathy and the tolerance, the willingness to hear a man out. I can recognize those qualities for a very good reason. I'm a gentleman, myself.

Oh, you wouldn't think so from looking at me, I know. And you wouldn't think so if you read my medical file. It says that I am David Greenlea, merchant seaman, a hopeless paranoiac suffering from insane delusions. But sir, I swear to you I'm *not* David Greenlea, and I'm *not* insane!

Let me tell you, sir, just how it happened. And let me beg of you not to judge me by the way I look. This broken nose, these gnarled hands—they're not mine, I tell you, they're not

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mine! They belong to David Greenlea, that's true. But I'm not David Greenlea, I'm not, I'm *not*! I'm *Edgar* Greenlea, Vice-President of the Overseas Shipping Company, with a house on Edgewater Drive and a wife and two fine children . . . Oh, you *must* believe me!

But wait, I'm going too fast. I can see the disbelief in your eyes. And the pity. Yes, the pity! I don't blame you, sir, really I don't. But hear me out, I beg of you. It will only take a minute or two. And it will cost you nothing. Just a cigarette, perhaps, if you're so inclined.

It happened a year ago, almost to the day. I was in my office, as usual. I was in my own body, too, not this tattooed monstrosity that you're looking at. Oh, I know that sounds insane, but let me explain, *please*!

One of our ships, the *Eastern Sun*, had docked only that morning. About noon they brought me word that David Greenlea had come ashore, was drinking himself blind in a water-front tavern. David Greenlea, my first cousin, a wretched ne'er-do-well, always drunk or fighting, always in trouble. I had got him his berth on the *Eastern Sun*. Without my influence, he would have lost it a dozen times. But there was no gratitude on his part, sir. None at all. Indeed, he hated me, hated me because I was successful, respected, everything he wanted to be—and was not. Malevolent as he was, I felt responsible for him as a member of the family. And so I went down to that tavern. I found him, drunk and disgusting. I took him into a back room and ordered coffee. We were alone there . . .

Sir, could you *possibly* let me have a cigarette? Just one? Look, I'll stretch my arm through the bars as far as it will go. If you could just put one in my fingers, I'd be so grateful. Really, you don't know how agonizing it is to watch another man smoke when you . . . Oh, thank you, sir, you are most kind!

So I made David drink the coffee. I got him fairly sober, but he kept reviling me. He accused me of secretly loathing him, despising him. I said that I didn't despise him, I only pitied him. When I said that, he gave me a strange look, half drunken and half cunning. Then he smiled. I tell you, sir, I have seen that smile a thousand times since, in my dreams.

" Let me show you a trick, Cousin Edgar," he said, " a trick I learnt from a sing-song girl in Hong Kong. A little magic, black or white depending on where you sit."

He took something out of his pocket and put it on the table, and I saw that it was a cone of cheap incense.

" First there must be pity," he said, smiling that evil smile,

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" if the spell is to work. Then there must be a burnt offering, and finally there must be the words."

I thought he was raving, but I decided to humour him. So I . . . Pardon me, sir, could I trouble you for a light? You needn't give me a match, just hold the flame where I can reach it with the tip of the cigarette. That's right. Thank you. Ah, that's good . . .

So I said to my cousin David, " What words? "

He had the incense lighted now; and the smoke was rising up between us. He looked at me through it, just as I am looking at you. Then he said the words. Come closer. I'll whisper them to you. Just a little closer. There!

It works! It works! By the ancient and terrible gods, the spell still works! I thought it would, I hoped it would! Oh, I *am* sorry, sir, to leave you in there. But I had to get out, I had to! And this was the only way. I had to change places with you, don't you see? I had to exchange bodies with you, just the way David did with me!

Oh, *please* don't scream like that, and shake the bars. The attendants will come and put you in a straitjacket. Because to them *you'll just be David Greenlea, merchant seaman, hopeless paranoiac.* And, no matter what you say, they won't believe you. You'll have to bide your time, just as I did. You'll have to wait until someone pities you, and then there must be a burnt offering, remember, and then the words. Don't forget the words.

Now I must be going, for I have much to do. Ah yes, much to do. My cousin David will not be expecting me, not looking like this. What a surprise for David, what a surprise!

I'll take your car, sir, because you won't be needing it any more. Thank you for everything, especially the burnt offering—I mean, the cigarette. Good-bye, sir. Good-bye.

★ ★ ★

PRIZE CROSSWORD NO. 14. Argosy's fourteenth Prize Crossword Competition appears on page 144. There will be one-guinea book tokens for the first *five* correct solutions checked on the closing date. If you do not wish to cut Argosy, copy your solution on to a plain sheet of paper, adding your name and address in capital letters. Entries should be completed *in ink*, and posted to: ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD (No. 14), 3 Pilgrim Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp), to arrive by Thursday, July 8th, the closing date.

We regret that entry must be limited to readers living in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and Eire. There is no entry fee and the Editor's decision is final.

Names of the prize-winners in this competition and the solution will appear in the issue of Argosy on sale September 10th.

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BROTHERS OF THE ANGLE

Lord! what good hours do we keep!
How quietly we sleep!
What peace! what unanimity!

CHARLES COTTON, 1630–87

Fishing is a kind of hunting by water . . . Many gentlemen in like sort with us will wade up to the arm-holes upon such occasions, and voluntarily undertake that, to satisfy their pleasure, which a poor man for a good stipend would scarce be hired to undergo . . .

ROBERT BURTON, 1577–1640, *Anatomy of Melancholy*

Interlude

Sometimes an angler comes, and drops his hook
Within its hidden depths, and 'gainst a tree
Leaning his rod, reads in some pleasant book,
Forgetting soon his pride of fishery;
And dreams, or falls asleep,
While curious fishes peep
About his nibbled bait, or scornfully
Dart off and rise and leap . . .

ROBERT BRIDGES, *There is a Hill Beside the Silver Thames*

The Fishing Match

At that moment three things happened to Mr. Handiman; he would never know which of them happened first. He heard a tremendous splash; he saw, between the leaves on the overhanging bough, a sudden swirl with a cavernous open mouth in the middle of it; he felt a kind of electric shock in the butt of his rod. He tightened, and the old greenheart top of the bamboo rod bent into the shape of a bow . . .

The woman downstream had at last realized that there was a fish on the end of Mr. Handiman's line; and she jigged up and down on the bank, yelling encouragement . . . and several of the nearby fishermen, who had already given up hope of catching anything themselves, came running to see what the commotion was about. Now they all began to give Mr. Handiman contrary advice: "Let 'im 'ave 'is 'ead!" "Kape a toight loine on

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'im!" "Tike care of them wades! Moind 'e don't git into them wades!" and so on. But Mr. Handiman . . . took no notice of them. He knew that he had hooked the chub well and truly . . .

Raising the point of his rod, and so dragging the exhausted fish over the ledge of gravel, Mr. Handiman stepped into the water, where immediately he sank up to his knees. At that moment the fish gave a flick of its tail and a last plunge . . . and Mr. Handiman, plunging after it, seized it behind the gills. In doing so he simultaneously dropped his rod and lost his footing, but no matter, he had his fish. With the water up to his middle, he cradled it in his arms as if it were a baby; and indeed it weighed as much as most babies do when they are born. And so in triumph Mr. Handiman waded ashore, while Jimmy performed a war-dance on the bank, the downstream woman shouted, "It's a salmon! It's a salmon! It's a bloody great salmon!" and all his rivals waved their landing-nets and cheered . . .

In short, they were his brothers of the angle indeed—brothers and sisters of the angle . . .

Beaming from one to another of his new-found friends, Mr. Handiman loved them all.

JOHN MOORE, *Dance and Skylark*

Right Angling

I will, for sport's sake, give you an old rhyme out of an old fish-book—

My rod and my line, my float and my lead,
My hook and my plummet, my whetstone and knife,
My basket, my baits both living and dead,
My net, and my meat, for that is the chief:
Then I must have thread, and hairs green and small,
With mine angling purse—and so you have all.

But you must have all these tackling, and twice so many more, with which, if you mean to be a fisher, you must store yourself; and to that purpose I will go with you either to Mr. Margrave, who dwells amongst the booksellers in St. Paul's Churchyard, or to Mr. John Stubs, near to the Swan in Golden Lane; they be both honest men, and will fit an angler with what tackling he lacks.

IZAAK WALTON,
The Compleat Angler, 1653

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Easy Catch

In ye month of November, 1692, there was a trout found in ye Poyningswish, in Twineham, which was 29 inches long from ye top of ye nose to ye tip of ye taile; and John fflint had him and eat him.

He was left in a low slank after a fflood, and ye water fell away from him, and he died. The fish I saw at John fflint's house ye Sunday after they had him: and at night they boiled him for supper, but could not eat one halfe of him; and there was six of them at supper . . . and ye next day they all fell on him again, and compassed him.

RICHARD STAPLEY, *Diary*

Shooting a Line

I asked one man if he did not find it monotonous. He said no, that when he got tired of fishing for roach he fished for perch. . .

ROBERT GIBBINGS, *Sweet Thames Run Softly*

Poacher's Defence

" Sir, for God's sake do not take it ill of me if I tell the truth, how the other evening I went along to the bank of the pond, and saw the fish playing in the water so lovely and bright, and for the great craving I had for a perch I lay down on the bank of the pond and with my hand only and quite simply took and carried away this perch, and I will tell thee the cause of my covetous desire, my companion, that is my wife had lain in bed a whole month . . . and never eaten or drunk anything she could relish, and for the craving to taste a perch she sent me to the bank of the pond to take one perch only."

Thomas of the Moor, charged with taking fish from his Lord's pond, 1277

Envoy

Give me mine angle; we'll to the river: there—
My music playing far off—I will betray
Tawny-finn'd fishes . . .

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,
Antony and Cleopatra

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★ SCIENCE FICTION CHOICE

BELLS ON HIS TOES

"Where's that music coming from?" asked the blonde

by CLEVE CARTMILL

SERGEANT HANK SMILEY of the Anti-Swindle Squad was a large young man, built somewhat on the scale of a Norse hammer-thrower, and he did not like appearing in public in his stockinged feet.

But, the pretty blonde guardian of the Temple's outer portals assured him, he must remove his shoes before entering into the presence of Dr. Ishmael Swaam, whose "D.Sc.M.D." Hank had been delegated to investigate.

"Maybe you didn't understand," Hank said firmly. "I am a cop, not a convert."

The round blue eyes below the glittering turban were pleasant, but adamantine. "You must obey the Orders, sir."

So Hank went to one of the chairs along the wall and removed his Oxfords, furtively examining his socks for holes. He was flushed with discomfort, and lapped one large foot over the other when he had pushed his shoes under the chair.

The blonde, unsmiling, said, "Come," and led the way in whispering blue robes.

Hank filed the pitch of her voice in the E-flat cubby-hole of his mind, an unconscious hang-over from a childhood musical education, and noted that she was somewhat like Lakmé in her night-club costume. She conducted him to a door which was covered with cabalistic symbols and apparently led to the inner sanctum. When she opened it, a gong somewhere in the dim interior rang out an announcement on middle C.

Presently he was in a circular room at the end of a corridor and seated at an ebony table opposite Dr. Swaam.

"You," said the doctor in a deep B flat, "are not here for guidance."

Hank looked steadily at the dark triangular face with its bright, wide eyes. "I'm here to find out about this cult of yours, Doctor, and your degree."

"Cult? This is no cult, young man. I am a teacher, carrying

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the lamp of mental culture down dim corridors of unused minds. My degree translates into Doctor of the Science of Mental Dynamics."

"We have certain laws regulating pseudo-religious groups," Hank said tentatively.

"I observe them. My followers are not a pseudo-religious group. We are scientific. I know your laws, and stay well inside. What do you want to know?"

"Well, mainly just that. Now and then some fellow comes along and promises to show anybody the other side of the moon for a four-dollar initiation fee and a course of instruction. I just want to make sure no fraud is present."

"I promise nothing," said Dr. Swaam. "My degree, straight from the High Lama of the order in Tibet, simply states that I am qualified to direct mental callisthenics designed to develop little used, if any, portions of the brain. Emoluments for this service come from increased earnings made possible by the increased mental activities of my students."

Hank reflected on this, drumming a soft tattoo on the polished table-top. "I'm no lawyer, and I can't pick any holes in it. But I'm supposed to make a report. If you could give me a short demonstration, say, of a lesson—"

"Certainly. The theory is simply that mind triumphs over matter." Dr. Swaam put a long graceful hand under the table, and the circular room went dark except for a bar of light across the doctor's eyes.

"Look at the spot between my eyes, Sergeant. Rid your mind of all thoughts except one. If you are sure enough that it will be true, it will be. Look steadily, relax, and concentrate."

Hank looked, relaxed, and concentrated on the first thing that popped into his mind, his own version of a nursery rhyme his mother had crooned to him in childhood:

Rings on his fingers, bells on his toes,
He shall make music wherever he goes.

This went on for some time, the rhyme running through his head, his gaze fixed on the smooth spot between the eyes of Dr. Ishmael Swaam, D.Sc.M.D.

The lights glowed again, and Dr. Swaam snapped his fingers at Hank, who had become somewhat rigid. "That is a sample. We go from there gradually to consideration of specific problems. In some instances, our results are gratifying."

Hank shook his head free of a curious lethargy, dropped his glance to his own hands, and was slightly startled to see a ring on each. They were his. one a plain gold band, the other set with a

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reconstructed ruby. But he never wore them, and he did not remember having put them on this morning. He shrugged away any further thoughts of this and got to his feet. Somewhere an orchestra was playing *Six Lessons from Madame La Zonga.*

Dr. Swaam rose and stood listening for a moment. "This room is supposed to be sound-proof," he said. "I wonder where that radio is." He seemed witlessly adrift for a moment. "Ah . . . er . . ..oh yes, literature."

He drew aside a curtain on one wall and took pamphlets from a polished cabinet. He gave these to Hank, murmured farewells, and Hank left. As he was closing the door behind him, the orchestra modulated into Tosti's *Good-bye.*

He walked down the carpeted corridor to the big door, humming the words that formed in his mind: *Good-bye, for ever. Good-bye, for ever.* He opened the door into the reception room where the blonde presided, and had the first intimation of what had happened to him.

As he stepped into the room, a full symphonic orchestra crashed into the majestic opening chords of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*: *Ta-ta-ta DUMMMM! Ta-ta-ta DUMMMMM-MMMM!*

The blonde lost her ritualistic calm. She jerked her turbaned head towards the door. Hank grinned a trifle foolishly.

"Some entrance," he said. "I used to think how nice it would be to be a dictator and have that music played every time I came into a room."

He went over to the chair and put on his shoes while the blonde smiled doubtfully at him. A hill-billy band began to play *Oh, Dem Golden Slippers* and *All God's Chillun Got Shoes* alternately.

He departed from the Temple in a cloud of confusion shared by the blonde, who pondered on the receding strains of *Aloha Oe*, played on steel guitars and ukeleles.

Followed by the puzzled glances of loiterers in the City Hall, Hank entered the office of the Chief of Detectives, Joe Ross.

Ta-ta-ta DUMMMM! Ta-ta-ta DUMMMMMMMMM!

The Chief started, swung up a somewhat choleric countenance as the mighty chords died, and shot a glance full of suspicion across his desk.

"Oh," he said in a hoarse whisper, "it's you, Hank. Got a job for you."

"What's the matter with your voice, chief?"

"Laryngitis. Bad."

The unseen orchestra began to play the mournful strains of *Moanin' Low* as Hank clucked in sympathy and sank into a chair.

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The Chief's eyes wheeled about the whitewashed room, touched on the closed windows and doors, came to rest on Hank.

" Where the hell's the music comin' from? "

Hank kept his face blank, muttered, " Outside, I guess," and pondered the situation. He had thought it strange that he had heard Von Suppé's *Light Cavalry Overture* during his journey from Dr. Swaam's Temple to the City Hall. When he had entered its concrete archway and the sonorous fanfare of Beethoven's *Fifth* had sounded again, his musical experiences of the morning had shifted into uneasy focus. As he had walked down the corridor to the Chief's office accompanied by a brass band softly playing Sousa's *El Capitan* he had come to a fearful conclusion. When the full symphony had again announced his entrance into this office, he was certain. It must be that nursery rhyme:

Rings on his fingers, bells on his toes,
He shall make music wherever he goes.

Dr. Swaam had said, " If you are sure enough that it will be true, it will be." Apparently, Hank had been sure.

Chief Ross cut short his thoughts by shoving a manuscript across the desk. " Radio speech," he said. " You make it. Eight o'clock tonight. My throat's too bad."

Hank winced at the rasp of Chief Ross's voice, and the orchestra shifted into the *Dead March* from *Saul*. " I'm no broadcaster," Hank protested. " Why can't somebody else do it? "

" Tried 'em all. Refused. You do it. Orders. I can't. It'd kill me."

Somewhere rollicking wood-winds began to swing *I'll be Glad when you're Dead* while Hank glanced at the speech. It was entitled " Master Swindlers in Southern California and How to Stop Their Activities."

" That damn music! " rasped Chief Ross. " Stop it when you go out."

Hank nodded, got to his feet.

" Did you see Dr. Swaam? " the Chief asked.

" Yes," Hank said grimly. " I'm going to see him again. Then I'll make my report."

" O.K. And see who's playing that radio. Stuff it down his throat. I hate music."

Hank tore through traffic towards the Temple with a screaming siren, accompanied by a stirring interpretation of the *Ride of the Valkyries*, slid to a halt before the Gate, and plunged up the marble steps. The blonde was there, sans robes, sans turban, obviously rifling her desk of personal effects.

Her glance at Hank gave off an almost tangible blue fire as she

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tucked a white handbag under her elbow and flounced towards the door.

"Just a minute!" Hank said. "I want to see Dr. Swaam, and quickly."

"He's gone."

"When will he be back?"

"He won't be."

"Has he hopped it?"

"You should know," the blonde said bitterly.

Hank went into action. "Where's your phone? Where was he headed for?"

"He didn't say. The phone's over there."

She started for the door again, but halted at Hank's command and stood waiting while he turned in a general order to pick up Dr. Ishmael Swaam and transport him to Headquarters. An unseen violin carried the melody of *Some Day I'll Find You*. Hank cradled the phone and looked grimly at the pretty blonde.

"Now! What is going on here?"

"Nothing. Not any longer."

"You know where he is. You'd better tell me."

"I don't know!" she protested. "All I know is he did a bunk because he's afraid of the police. He's a fake, and he didn't want to be arrested."

"I don't want to arrest him," Hank said. "He's no fake."

The blonde sank into one of the chairs along the wall and gave an empty smile. "Just my luck. I finally get a job, after pounding pavements and haunting film studios for months, and a week later it finishes through a misunderstanding. What am I going to do now?"

"Don't worry," Hank soothed. "You'll get your job back as soon as we pick up the doctor."

"Where's that music coming from?" she asked.

Hank told her.

She didn't think it was funny. In fact, she was awed. But she wearied of music before the day was through at her flat, where Hank had gone on the theory that if Dr. Swaam tried to establish contact with anybody he would choose his ex-receptionist.

Though the blonde, who was named Helen, tired of solid musical fare, the little girl from next door, aged six, thought Hank was wonderful. Until she was called for dinner, she stood around, entranced, with her finger in her mouth, and requested an occasional selection between Hank's reading of the radio speech and his phone calls to Headquarters.

As it grew later, a sickening certainty grew within Hank. Dr. Ishmael Swaam, D.Sc.M.D., had apparently vanished.

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The radio announcer, who sat at the little table facing Hank, and the engineer in the glass cubicle were both earnest young men who strove for precision and quality in each programme under the aegis of their network. They knew what each programme was like before it began, and they worked as a team in presenting it to the public. The announcer set the stage in rich, authoritative tones, and timed the show; the engineer protected the modulation curve from distortion.

They were shocked, then, when the introduction of the man from the Anti-Swindle Squad was augmented by impressive chords from Ludwig van Beethoven's most famous symphony.

" —Sergeant Henry Smiley," the announcer concluded and nodded a dark head at Hank.

Ta-ta-ta DUMMMM! Ta-ta-ta DUMMMMMMMM! "

The announcer was too well trained to make an involuntary sound before an open microphone. He stifled his surprise and hurried into the control room to rage at the equally bewildered engineer.

" There's no music on this! " the announcer said.

The engineer pointed at the empty turn-tables. " I didn't play it," he said.

" Who the hell did, then? "

" There must be a feedback. Listen! "

Hank's voice poured out of the control-room monitor. " In the near future," he was reading, " this entire community will be completely rid of men who promote fraudulent schemes of any nature, and the public will be able to relax and conduct business with perfect confidence."

The words were from the script, a copy of which the engineer followed with his eyes, but not the organ that accompanied this Utopian forecast with *The Voice that Breathed o'er Eden.*

" That's going on the air! " the announcer snapped.

" That doesn't worry me," retorted the engineer, " half so much as where it's coming from. Scurry round the other studios. See if anybody's rehearsing. I'll check my circuits."

The announcer ran from one studio to another, and found them deserted. The next programme was to be a recording, and the remainder of the day's broadcasting was composed of remote dance jobs and relays from other stations. None of the studios was in use. During his search, the announcer heard snatches of Hank's speech with a variety of musical backgrounds.

" —And the master swindler must go! " Hank said. This warning was backed up by a swing arrangement of *Get out of Town!*

" —Fraudulent promoters are parasites on the body politic,"

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Hank said, and out over the air went a smooth rumba arrangement of *I've Got you under my Skin.*

The engineer felt that he should take the programme off the air, but was afraid to do so without orders from one of the higher-ups, all of whom had gone home, and none of whom would be listening to a civic welfare speech. So he and the announcer watched through the control-room window as Hank read the speech and musical accompaniments changed in conformance to the text but with no regard to the clearance of radio rights.

Hank's last paragraph was forceful. The announcer was back at the table, ready to close the programme and read an advertising slogan for second-hand cars, and he tried not to listen to the speech or the music that came from nowhere. He was a beaten man.

"—And in the name of the community," Hank said, "in the name of its citizens, in the name of public decency, I warn all swindlers: we have no place here for you."

As this sturdy announcement modulated the station's carrier wave, a little jive outfit applied a jungle beat to the *Take it Away, Henry, I Don't Want it No More Blues*, featuring a brawling trombone and a very raucous trumpet.

The speech and its musical condiments led to a conference on the next day between the radio-station manager, the President of the Chamber of Commerce, Hank, and Chief Ross. The meeting broke all records for confusion. The radio man demanded an explanation of the music, and payment of fines for broadcasting copyright tunes; the President of the Chamber of Commerce demanded an apology to the fair city; and Chief Ross demanded Hank's resignation from the force.

Not that it settled anything or explained anything; but they were mollified to a certain extent when Hank complied with the Chief's wish and walked out jobless. Hank refused to admit any knowledge of the music, pretended not to hear the cacophony which accompanied the conference, and hid his affliction with a deep sense of shame. He stalked out of the meeting with the remembered strains of *My Last Good-bye* quivering in the electric atmosphere of the office.

Next, it was his landlady. While paying his rent that evening, in advance, the power went off for some thirty seconds. Though the radio went dead instantly, one of Hank's little ensembles continued in key, spotlighting a hot piano in *Scrub Me, Mama, with a Boogie Beat.*

The landlady, a large grey woman, handed him his money when the lights came on again. "You move out tonight," she

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ordered. When Hank started to protest, she went on firmly: "I don't want to talk about it. I hope some day I'll be able to forget it. Good-bye, Mr. Smiley, whatever you are."

Hank went from one hotel to another, was turned out sometimes before the day was over, and was asked to leave a series of boarding-houses. He refused even to discuss the source of his musical accompaniments and, as a result, was regarded by others with a certain fear. Finally he rented a room from a deaf landlady, and took up the search for Dr. Swaam with a worried eye on his dwindling savings. The search necessitated, of course, his entering hotels, theatres, restaurants, and other buildings; and each occasion was announced by Beethoven's ominous fanfare.

He became chary of doorways, and made fantastic efforts to avoid them. He began to hate humanity as one experience after another brought its inevitable embarrassment. His growing poverty and final resignation to the fact that Dr. Ishmael Swaam would never be found to remove this curse led Hank finally to his room near the end of this period. He shunned friends and public contacts of any sort, a bitter young man who regarded life and the future with a morbid eye.

One experimental meeting with the pretty blonde, Helen, after their first, had convinced both that further relations were impractical, and they had parted incompatible friends. But she was the only person who knew what had happened to him, and he felt a desire to find her, for she would be a comfortable light in his sodden world of gloom. He finally ran her to earth by phone at Colossal Studios.

"I've been combing the town for three days for you," she said. "Listen, I'm a receptionist here in the music department. I don't have anything to do with the music, but I learnt they have a problem here. You might be able to solve it. Would you care to try?"

Hank leaped at it like a piranha at raw meat. He had lost hope, drowned it in shame and misery, and had never considered turning his affliction to commercial use.

"Would I! Whatever it is! They don't have to pay me, either. Just give me an old sack to sleep on, and an old shoe to gnaw, and a kind word on Wednesdays."

"Well, come out, and I'll explain."

Singing strings, playing *Clap Hands, Here Comes Charley!* accompanied him to the studio.

Helen, in a pert blue dress and high heels, vouched for him at the gate and tucked a hand under his arm as they walked across the lot to the Administration Building.

"I had to tell Mr. Taran, the music director, what had hap-

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pened to you," Helen said. "He didn't believe it, but he said if it was true you could be a big help in scoring scripts. He's got one for you to try."

"I can't write music."

"You won't need to. If you can make the right music as you read the script, they have musicians who can jot it down. Your audition is going to be on the toughest one they have. They've been wrangling about it in the music departments for weeks."

"I don't know," Hank said doubtfully. "I've never tried turning it on and off, like a gramophone."

"Oh, don't try," Helen said quickly. "The best part about it is what your subconscious does. You feel a certain way, and out comes the right music. Just forget the music when you read the script."

Hank was introduced to the dark, whiplike Mr. Taran, who was in turn sceptical, interested, amazed, and finally respectful when Hank read the script. As in his single venture in broadcasting, appropriate music was played by a variety of orchestras. There was hot swing and stinging brasses for a dance sequence, jive for a dive, and a bank of shimmering violins for a moonrise over a lake.

"This is colossal!" said Mr. Taran. "Wait till I call Mr. Vortel."

Hank went through his paces for a series of officials, and was happy to find that these men not only did not regard his ability with distrust and fear, but expressed an honest admiration for his talent and forecast a brilliant future.

He auditioned for several days, during which the rains came to Southern California. They held up contractual negotiations to see if the change in weather affected Hank's performance.

It did not. He provided the right music at the right time, and in addition provided a pleasant note of irony by walking through downpours accompanied by an energetic rendering of *Rain, Rain, Go Away!*

Finally they signed a contract, an ironclad document, for they regarded Hank as a valuable property and did not wish to chance his bettering himself at a rival studio. The contract expressly stated that as long as Hank reported for duty and was able to produce music he was to be paid a beginning salary of $1000 each week, with a rising scale adjusted to the passage of time. Any possible breach was defined in its clauses, and huge forfeits were required for same.

In celebration, Hank took Helen to dinner that evening. They braved the rain and flooded streets to dine at a swanky Mecca of cookery. Hank's happiness was so incoherent that their meal was

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accompanied by soft invisible string combinations playing purring little tunes that had no names.

"Gosh!" Hank said in awe as they lit cigarettes over their coffee. "I still don't believe it."

"I'm terribly glad I happened to think of you," Helen said. "I've been worried about you."

Hank subjected her to a silent though pleasant scrutiny. Her blondeness, her pertness, her sleekness in the simple white evening gown made a neat and desirable package.

"I can't tell you, Helen, how happy I am. I'd got used to this crazy situation, and didn't even hear the music myself, but it bid fair to wreck my chances at a job. I wish I could do something you'd like to express my appreciation."

She didn't speak, but her eyes had an expectant light.

Hank Smiley was not one to take the long way round. "I might as well find out," he said. "The only way I know is to ask. Do you think you could get used to the music, too, and not hear it after a while?"

She smiled at him, but her eyes were serious. "Almost everybody is trying to hide something, Hank. You've turned a liability into an asset, but you're still trying to hide it. As long as you're conscious of it, I can't forget it. It'll be easy for me to forget it as soon as you do."

"Well, I was ashamed of it for a long time," Hank admitted. "But that seems silly. I'll forget it, all right."

"Then," Helen said, "of course I'll marry you."

Hank's happiness soared to impossible peaks during the remainder of the evening. The dark brown future he had envisioned had become a bright blue present. He had a job, he had a girl, and life was marvellous. Until it was time to take Helen home, the various orchestras subject to his mental beck and call improvised on the theme of love, with *You Go to my Head*, *It's the Talk of the Town*, excerpts from *Tristan und Isolde*, and others.

He overcame his self-consciousness to such an extent that he took off his shoes and socks to carry Helen across a flooded pavement to her door and she heard the tinkle of little invisible bells that sounded whenever Hank walked barefoot. They chuckled at this, Hank's most carefully guarded secret. She thought it was delicious.

So, after a brief idyllic honeymoon, Hank reported for work. He was happy. He knew it. He wanted others to know.

They soon did.

He had been on the pay-roll two months when studio heads met in an ornate office in a final despairing effort to solve a prob-

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lem that had become intolerable. Hank was not present at this meeting, for he had been banished some weeks before to a sound-proof cubicle at the far edge of Colossal's lot. He was represented by his solicitor, however, and that gentleman was firm.

"You *can't* break his contract!" he told the assembled officials and the studio solicitor. He pounded the desk a little. "Read his contract. As long as he reports for work and produces music, you've got to pay him. He can't be fired except for certain breaches he hasn't made and won't make."

One of the officials, a bald man called Moe by the others, seemed near to tears. "A thousand good dollars, a grand a week we're paying!" he wailed. "It ain't right. It ain't decent!"

Hank's solicitor was like a rock. "You can't do anything but hope he'll pull out of this groove. I'm ashamed of you all, making such a hullabaloo over this. Haven't you any sympathy for my client?"

"Sure we've got sympathy," Moe interrupted. "But just thinking about it gives me the heeby jeebies. Ever since he came to work here, day and night and maybe even holidays, over and over and over and *over* he's playing only *Happy Days Are Here Again!*"

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ANSWERS to ON THE OFFENSIVE!

on page 24

1. *Mr. Pickwick to Mr. Winkle when the latter can't skate, in "Pickwick Papers," by Charles Dickens.*
2. *Macbeth to Servant, in "Macbeth," by William Shakespeare.*
3. *Smee to Captain Hook, when Peter Pan called the latter a codfish, in "Peter Pan," by J. M. Barrie.*
4. *Jack Worthing of Lady Bracknell, when she objects to him as her niece's suitor, in "The Importance of Being Earnest," by Oscar Wilde.*
5. *A fox to Toad, when he is disguised as a washerwoman, in "The Wind in the Willows," by Kenneth Grahame.*
6. *Ananias the Puritan to Surly, who is dressed as a Spanish nobleman, in "The Alchemist," by Ben Jonson.*
7. *The monk to Brother Lawrence, in "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," by Robert Browning.*
8. *Lady Marguerite Blakeney to Chauvelin, in "The Scarlet Pimpernel," by Baroness Orczy.*

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VALE OF DEVILS

by SIR JOHN MANDEVILLE

*Marvels and strange customs abound in the manuscript pages of Sir John Mandeville's Travels, written in French, c.*1360. *His imagination was magnificently fleet of foot, and the robots of science fiction fade into insignificance beside the full-blooded authenticity of his monsters. Bunyan may have known this account of the Vale of Devils (taken from Odoric's description of a perilous valley* 40 *miles from Kabul). Our extract is based on the* 15*th-century Egerton text, edited for The Hakluyt Society by Malcolm Letts, F.S.A.*

A LITTLE from that place is a great marvel. For there is a vale between two hills that is four mile long; and some men call it the Vale of Enchanting, some the Vale of Devils, and some the Vale Perilous. In this vale are oft-times heard many tempests and voices, ugly and hideous, both on nights and on days. And some time there is heard noise as it were of trumpets and tabors and of drums, as it were at feasts of great lords. This vale is full of devils and always has been; and men say in that country that there is an entry to hell.

In this vale is mickle gold and silver; and for to get thereof there come many men, both Christian and heathen, and enter into that vale. But there come but few out again, and namely of miscreants, for all those that go thither because of covetise are strangled with devils and foredone.

In midst of the vale under a rock is showed openly the head and the visage of a devil, right hideous and dreadful to see; and there is nothing seen thereof but the head from the shoulders upward . . . And he beholds ilk man so sharply and so felly, and his eyes are so fast stirring and sprinkling as fire, and he changes so oft his countenance, and out of his mouth and his nose comes so great plenty of fire of divers colours with so great stink, that no man may suffer it.

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But alway good Christian men, that are stable in the faith, may go into that valley without great harm, if they be clean shriven and bless them with the token of the Cross; for then shall devils not harm them. And if all they escape without harm of body, nevertheless they escape not without great dread; for fiends appear to them openly and menace them and fly up and down in the air with great thunders and lightnings and hideous tempests: . . .

My fellows and I, when we came near that valley and heard speak thereof, some of us cast in our hearts to put us all wholly in the mercy of God to pass through that valley, and some forsook it and said they would not put them in that peril. And there were in our company two friars minor of Lombardy, that said they would go through that valley if we would go with them; and so, through comfort of their words and the excitation of them, we shrove us clean and heard mass and communed us and went into the valley, fourteen fellows together. But at the coming out we were but nine.

We wist never what happened to the remnant, whether they were lost or they turned again; but we saw them no more . . .

And my fellows and I went through the valley, and saw many marvellous things and gold and silver and precious stones and many other jewels on ilk a side us, as us thought; but whether it were as it seemed, or it was but fantasy, I wot not. But for the dread that we had and also for it should not let our devotion, we would lay hand on nothing that we saw; for we were more devout then than ever we were before or after, for fear of devils that appeared til us in divers figures and for the multitude of dead men's bodies that lay there in our way . . .

But I dare not say that they were all very bodies that I saw in that valley, but I trow that fiends gert there seem so many bodies for to fear us with . . .

And I do you to wit that we were oft-times stricken down to the earth with great hideous blasts of wind and of thunder and other tempests; but through the grace of Almighty God we passed through that valley hale and sound.

Beyond that valley is a great isle, where the folk that dwell therein are als mickle of stature as they were giants of twenty-eight or of thirty foot long. Clothes have they none to wear, but skins of beasts, wherewith they cover their bodies. Bread eat they none; but they eat raw flesh and drink milk, for there is great plenty of beasts.

Houses have they none to dwell in; and they will gladlier eat man's flesh than any other . . .

And men told us that there is another isle beyond that, where

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giants are, mickle more than these, for some of them are fifty foot long, some sixty. I had no will to see them, for there may no man come into that isle but that he shall also be strangled with those monsters. In those isles among the giants are sheep als mickle as oxen, but the wool of them is great and coarse. Of these sheep have I oft seen; and some men have oft-times seen of these giants take men in the sea and come to land with two in the one hand and two in the tother, eating of their flesh raw.

There is another fair isle and a good and full of folk, where the manner is such that, when a woman is new wedded she shall not the first night lie with her husband, but with another young man, that shall assay her that night and have her maidenhead, taking on the morrow a certain money for his travail.

And there are ordained in ilk a town certain young men for to do that service, the which they call Gadlibiriens, that is to say, "fools despaired."

And they say there and affirm for sooth that it is a full perilous thing to take the maidenhead of a maiden; for, as they say, whoso does, puts himself in peril of death. And if the husband of the woman find her maiden on the night next suing —for peradventure he that should have had her maidenhead was drunken, or for any other reason did not his devoir to the woman —then her husband shall have his action against him before the justices of the land, als fortherly as he had been about for to slay him. But after the first night that these women are so defouled they are kept so straitly that they shall not speak ne come in company of those men.

I asked them what was the cause and the reason that such a custom was used there. And they told me that in old time some men were dead in that country through the defloration of maidens, for they had within them snakes, that stung the husbands on the yards in the women's bodies; and so were many men slain, and therefore used they there that custom to make other men to assay the passage before they put themselves to that adventure.

Another isle there is southward in the great sea Ocean, wherein are wicked women and fell, that in their eyes have precious stones growing. And they are of such a kind that if they look upon a man with an irous will through the virtue of those stones they slay him with their looking, as the basilisk does.

Near that isle is another isle, where women make mickle sorrow when their childer are born, and mickle joy when that they are dead, and call their friends and make feast and take the dead child and cast it in a great fire and burn it . . .

The cause why they weep and make sorrow at the birth of their childer and make joy when they die is for, when they are born into

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this world, they come to sorrow and to travail, and when they die, they go to the joy of Paradise, where rivers are of milk and honey and plenty of all manner of goods, and life without sorrow.

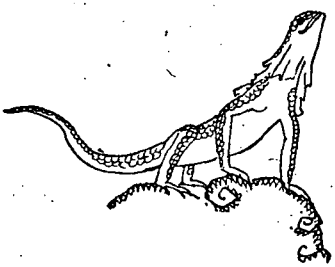
Beyond this isle is another isle in the sea, where is great plenty of folk . . . In this isle they wed their own daughter and their sisters and their sib women and dwell together in a house ten or twelve or more.

And ilk man's wife shall be common til other that lives there; and ilk one of them takes other wives, one a night, another another night.

And, when any of their wives bears a child, it shall be given to him that first lay by her that is the mother; and so is there none that wot whether the child be his or another man's. And, if a man say to them that on this wise may they father another man's child, they answer again that so do other men theirs.

In that country and throughout all India is great plenty of cocodrilles; and it is a manner of snake long of body. And on nights it is in waters, and on days in the earth in crevices or in crags; and in winter eat they no meat, but lie as they were half dead. This snake will slay men and devour them; and, when he eats, he moves the over-jaw and not the nether, and he has no tongue . . .

And there are beasts which they call orafles; and in Arabia they call them gyrfaunts (giraffes). And it is a fair beast, well dappled, of the height of a great steed or higher; and his neck is twenty cubits long, and his croup and his tail are like to a hart. And he may well enough stand on the earth and look over a high house. In that country also are many chamelions, the which is a little beast of the mickleness of a rat; and it neither eats ne drinks, but goes always with the mouth open, for it lives with the air. And it changes oft the colour in all manner of colours, save white and red, for now it will be of one colour and suddenly of another.



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There be also in that country passing great serpents, some of six score foot long and they be of divers colours, as rayed, red, green and yellow, blue and black, and all speckled. There are also snakes with combs on their heads, as it were a cock; and they are of four foot long or more, and go on feet nearhand upright. And they are commonly dwelling in rocks and crags and hills. And they are evermore gaping, ready for to shoot their venom. And there are also wild swine, als great as oxen and dappled and spotted as it were fawns of days. And there be also urchins als great as wild swine here; we clepe them Porcz de Spyne.

And there are lions all white, great and strong . . .

There is also other manner of beasts noyant and fell, of the mickleness of bears; and their heads are like boars' heads. They have six feet, and on ilk a foot are two nails, great and long and sharp. And of body they are like unto boars, but their tails are like lions' tails. There are also rats greater than hounds; and geese all red, out-taken the head and the neck, the which are black, and they are mickle more than our geese.

There are also many other manner of beasts in that country and in countries thereabout, of which it were too long to tell all the kinds and the shapes.

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No one knows where the Father of Lies,
Mandeville lies.
Was he buried in Ind, or in Rome,
Or at Liége, or nearer home?
I asked St. Peter, who said with a grin,
" He's here all right, I let him in.
But he won't stay put. Always on the go,
With his pan-out checks. Went down below
The other day and came back late
After closing time, hammering on the gate.
' Sorry,' he said, ' for this din.'
I was wild, but I let him in.
But oh glory,
What a man for a story! "
" But where is his grave? " said I,
" Where on earth does he lie? "
" That's clear," said St. Peter, " quite clear.
He's lying, still lying here."

MALCOLM LETTS

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SOMEONE SENT CIGARS

A Complete Short Novel

by KEM BENNETT

THE brass plate beside the shabby front door said, *Benten, Benten, Thoroughgood and Hartbottle, Solicitors-at-Law.* Jonathan walked into the outer office and old Hereward, the clerk, shouted, " He's here, sir," through the half-open door beside him.

Mr. Hartbottle's voice sounded briskly. " Come in, Jonathan. Come in, m' boy."

Jonathan went in. Mr. Hartbottle pushed his spectacles up onto his forehead. Jonathan sat down, observing with affectionate amusement that Mr. Hartbottle was looking as conscientiously Dickensian as ever. The office was unchanged, too. The same layers of immemorial dust lay snugly over the leather-bound law books in the bookcase. The same litter of unheeded correspondence covered Mr. Hartbottle's desk and, pushed to one side amid a welter of unsharpened pencils, red tape, sealing-wax, and old rubber bands, were three teacups—today's, yesterday's, and a dusty one from the day before that.

Mr. Hartbottle fitted into his background like a fat rock-fish hiding in a bank of weed. " My dear Jonathan," he said in his rich, plummy voice, " how delicious you look! "

Jonathan glanced at his feet. Hand-made shoes. He admired his Savile Row trousers; Glenurquhart tweed, fashionably narrow, beautifully cut. And his waistcoat; splendidly green, with mother-of-pearl buttons. He felt inclined to agree with Mr. Hartbottle. " Don't I just? " he said happily. " What's up? "

Mr. Hartbottle smiled. His face was fat, pink-cheeked, and quite round. Jonathan's was dark and lean, a dangerous face; a face

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that would have thrown a Victorian Mamma into a flutter of excitement on her own behalf and into a froth of despairing anxiety for the sake of her daughter's reputation. Mr. Hartbottle liked Jonathan's face. He liked Jonathan. In fact, Jonathan was the apple of his beady little eye.

"Got a job for you, m' boy," he said. "Won't explain now. Expecting a Very Important Person at any moment. You had better go through."

"Right," Jonathan said. "Will you press the magic button?"

Mr. Hartbottle nodded, beaming like a schoolboy. He pulled open a drawer in his huge antiquated desk and prodded downwards with a short, fat, tobacco-stained forefinger. There was a click. Jonathan leaned on a filing cabinet set against one wall of the office. It pivoted silently. He passed through the aperture behind it, and it swung shut automatically.

This was a very different sort of room. Small, square, boxlike, with no windows, and padded walls painted bright blue. There were two comfortable modern chairs set on either side of a table. That was all. No law books, no Dickensian paraphernalia, and no dust. No sound reached the little room from the outside world. London's traffic might have been stopped by a magic hand.

A pile of newspapers lay on the table. Jonathan glanced at the topmost. The headlines were peremptory; RUSSIA TESTS BOMB. GREAT EXPLOSION DETECTED IN URAL MOUNTAINS. He saw that there was an arrow in blue pencil pointing to the paragraphs dealing with the bomb and, beside it in Mr. Hartbottle's sprawling writing, the words: *Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest.*

Jonathan chuckled. Every schoolmaster he had ever known had favoured the same injunction. There was an indestructible piece of schoolmaster in Mr. Hartbottle. Dutifully, although he had already seen most of the papers, he picked one up and started to read. And as he read he sang a song to himself which he made up on the spur of the moment:

Mary had a little bomb;
Its noise was worse than thunder.
Mary was not a popular girl,
And no ruddy wonder!

Ten minutes later a door set in the wall opposite the one through which Jonathan had entered swung open. Jonathan rose to his feet. A Very Important Person stood, alone, on the threshold. Jonathan blinked.

The newcomer did not waste any time. "Sit down, Mr. Proudlove."

Jonathan sat down.

"I see you have been reading the papers. You will have remarked that there has been a large explosion in Russia."

"Yes, sir. I did."

The Very Important Person lowered himself carefully into the second chair, where he sat with his hands folded impassively. He smiled. "It was not a bomb, Mr. Proudlove."

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Jonathan inclined his head, saying nothing, doing his best to register deferential curiosity and keen intelligence. And wondering.

"We are confident that the explosion was unrehearsed, as it were," the deep voice continued. "We are almost sure that it was caused by an uncontrolled chain reaction in an experimental atomic pile."

Jonathan blinked for the second time. For a man who was normally difficult to surprise, he was taking a beating. "If you're right, sir," he said softly, "they must be kicking themselves."

The great man chuckled. "So one would imagine." He looked narrowly at Jonathan. "You did the Teheran job, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"You did well."

Jonathan scratched his nose. He tried to think of some way of expressing gratitude that would not twist his guts with embarrassment. Some of the pride and the eighteenth-century quality of the man he was facing entered his spirit and he said quietly, "No more than my duty, sir."

He was rewarded by a smile that made his heart beat faster.

"We have another task for you, Mr. Proudlove—greatly more important than the last in which you showed such good enterprise. Do you remember the affair of Professor Henry Brand?"

Jonathan concentrated. Brand. The name struck a chord in his memory. Details flooded back. Professor Brand had been a physicist—one of the roaming kind. On holiday in Austria at one moment, gone the next. And behind him the sound of an Iron Curtain clanging back into place. A great disappointment to his friends, Henry Brand had been! He looked up. "I remember, sir."

"Professor Brand went abroad with our connivance."

This time Jonathan managed not to blink. He drew a deep breath instead, and held it. A Very Important Chuckle broke the silence. "Yes, after some recent disappearances behind the Iron Curtain, we decided that the time was ripe to repay in kind. Professor Brand was courageous enough to volunteer to be infiltrated into the very lion's den."

"I take off my hat to him," Jonathan said huskily. There was little else to say.

"So do I." The sonorous voice, with submerged indications in it of the thunder it could command, went on, "Professor Brand is now on his way out, Mr. Proudlove. If everything has gone according to plan, our adversaries believe him to be dead. They will have found evidence to indicate that he died in the explosion you have just been reading about."

Jonathan leaned back in his chair. He saw in his mind's eye the buildings, the barbed wire, the acres of complex machinery, the laboratories, and the tall, belching chimneys of an atomic research station. Then he saw them dissolve in a blinding flash of unearthly power. The conception was too big to be swallowed in one gulp.

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Aloud, he said, " I see, sir." The words sounded very lame, but he could think of no better ones.

The man opposite him was talking again. " You will realize that it is urgently desirable that Professor Brand should reach England with the information he has acquired? "

Glorious understatement. Jonathan nodded. " Yes, sir."

" For that reason, Mr. Proudlove, we are sending you to the Baltic to meet Professor Brand. Before he left England we arranged in advance a place from which he would be picked up. We are awaiting a signal to go ahead with the operation. Mr. Hartbottle will give you all the details. Have I made myself clear? "

" Quite clear, sir."

The Very Important Person stood up. Behind him his chair creaked with happiness at having been relieved of his weight. He put out his hand. Jonathan took it. " Good luck, Mr. Proudlove," the wonderful voice said. " You will either have no trouble at all, or a great deal of trouble. If the Tartars even suspect that Henry Brand is alive they will mobilize corps of armies to prevent him reaching England. I shall rely upon you to guard him with your life."

Three hours later Jonathan left the offices of Benten, Benten, Thoroughgood, who were defunct, and Hartbottle, who was very much alive. They lay in a back street off the Strand. He walked through the gathering dusk to a famous West-End hotel where he went into the bar and ordered a drink. As always, the place was thronged with people. That suited Jonathan. He liked to think in company, especially when his thoughts were too secret to be breathed outside the little square room behind Mr. Hartbottle's office. Before he started to think he looked contentedly about him and wondered with a sardonic, inward smile what would have been the expression on the face of the vacuous blonde with a hat like a beehive, had she been able to read his mind.

It had taken Mr. Hartbottle over two hours to finish his briefing. Now Jonathan's mind was filled with complex information In order to fix it in his memory he started to recapitulate . . .

Copenhagen tomorrow. Word within a week via a go-between called Anna Jacobsen, whom he was to meet nightly in the bar of a centrally situated hotel. A ship, the *Ingeborg*, 1,400-ton coaster, skippered by a certain Nils Larsen, to take him to a rendezvous twenty miles south of Ribau on the Latvian coast. Watch to be kept for three successive nights during the hours of darkness. The signals—the morse letter C to be flashed from the shore, to be answered by L, to be answered by Y. The passwords or, in fact, pass-phrases . . . And so on.

Now and again, parts of Mr. Hartbottle's instruction recurred verbatim in Jonathan's memory. He remembered the lawyer saying, " A fair-haired, blue-eyed, wide-shouldered, angular great lump of a Dane with a great, sad face." That had been a description of Larsen, the *Ingeborg*'s skipper. Jonathan knew he would

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recognize the man. Again, " We picked this God-forsaken spot south of Ribau because it has a nice flat beach, m' boy, and we're told on good authority that it lies in a gap in their radar network." With comfortable assurance Jonathan knew that the beach would be flat and that there would be no radar. Mr. Hartbottle made no mistakes. In return, he expected no mistakes to be made where they could possibly be avoided. Mr. Hartbottle was the kind of employer a man liked to work for.

When Jonathan had finished his recapitulation, planning his perilous journey stage by stage from the first tense moment on a Latvian beach to the moment when he delivered Henry Brand to a certain country house in England, he knew that he had given his brain enough to work on for the time being. Later he would repeat the whole process. Later still he would think up variations and alternative plans to take care of emergencies. Now he wanted to eat.

He ate his dinner in the hotel grill. After that he went home to his flat in Knightsbridge and put a telephone call through to his father. When the Reverend Montagu Proudlove came to the telephone Jonathan explained that he was going abroad again. Mr. Proudlove grunted without surprise. " Where to this time, Jonathan? "

" Scandinavia, Father."

" Um. I see. When shall we see you back? "

" In about a fortnight, I expect."

There was a pause. Then Mr. Proudlove said mildly, " I envy you. Scandinavian food agrees with me and the ladies used to be most attractive. Take good care of yourself and bring me back some *Aquavit*."

That was all. Mr. Proudlove deluded himself that his son was the representative of a firm of marine insurance brokers. It was better that way since the truth would have scarified the old man's gentle soul, quite apart from the fact that the existence of the small organization known as List Nine, of which Mr. Hartbottle was the patron saint, was too great a secret to be revealed even to fathers in holy orders.

Showing no lights, the *Ingeborg* lay at anchor off the flat Latvian coast. She was a drab little ship with about as much distinction as a chipped earthenware teapot, yet during the war she had done many peculiar things on behalf of the Allied governments. Now she was at it again.

The sea was calm. Not a sound came from the anchored ship. It seemed, almost, as if she knew what she was up to.

In the blacked-out wheelhouse Jonathan lay full length on a battered bunk-seat by the chart-table. He had a cigarette in his mouth and was watching the steady spiral of blue smoke that drifted upwards from its end. He was not wearing hand-made shoes, nor a suit from Savile Row, but plimsolls and dirty blue overalls. There was a tense feeling in the pit of his stomach. Many

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people would have found it unpleasant. Not Jonathan. Life without tension had always seemed to him to be flatter than pond water, which was one of the reasons why he was employed as one of Mr. Hartbottle's operatives.

During the previous night the *Ingeborg* had waited throughout the hours of darkness but no sign of life had come from the desolate foreshore. She was waiting again tonight and would wait again tomorrow, if necessary.

Presently Nils Larsen, the *Ingeborg*'s master, came in from the bridge. He was fair-haired, blue-eyed, and wide-shouldered. His big sad face reminded Jonathan of one of Thurber's dogs.

"We have one hour more," he said in English with a Danish accent. "Then we must go or be caught here by the daybreak."

Jonathan smiled at him. "Yes, I know."

Larsen frowned. His face became more lugubrious than ever. "Ain't you got nerves, mister?"

Jonathan shrugged. "I don't know. Have you?"

The big Dane growled, muttering something vulgar under his breath in Danish. He picked a schnapps bottle off the chart-table and poured himself a drink.

"All right," Jonathan said. "I've got nerves. Pour me one too."

Larsen grinned. They raised their glasses. Larsen said "*Skaal!*" Jonathan said, "To Mr. X. I hope the poor devil makes it."

Then the door from the bridge opened and Pedersen, the Mate, stuck his head through. "There is a light," he said in Danish.

Jonathan was on his feet. He bent to scoop up the automatic rifle which lay on the deck by the bunk, and went out to the bridge. As he went the metallic noise of the rifle's action sliding backwards and forwards sounded in the silence. Jonathan smiled to himself. This was it. *I shall rely upon you to guard him with your life, Mr. Proudlove . . .*

There was a light winking on the beach. Dash-dot-dash-dot; the letter C. Jonathan took a flashlight from Pedersen and flashed L in reply. He waited for the answer, which had to be Y. Dash-dot-dash-dash. It was Y. Jonathan started to hum under his breath. He left the bridge, moving with animal sureness in the pitch darkness. Nils Larsen followed.

While they were making their way towards the place on the main deck where a ladder hung down over the ship's side, Jonathan saw that the man on the beach was flashing again, and he paused to read the flashes. They came quickly and were badly sent, as if the hand holding the flashlight were shaking with nervousness. S, and then O, and then S. And immediately the signal was repeated—S.O.S—S.O.S—S.O.S.

Jonathan stopped humming. His eyes had accustomed themselves to the darkness. It seemed to him that there was a glow in the sky behind the place from which the frantic signals were coming—a glow such as the headlights of a distant vehicle might

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make. He said, " Whoops! " softly under his breath, but Larsen's keen ears caught the word.

" What are you saying, mister? "

" I said ' Whoops! ' " Jonathan murmured. " It means let's get going because the spectacle is about to commence."

When they came to the ladder Jonathan went down it in a controlled slide, disdaining to use the rungs. A small boat lay in the calm water at the foot of the ladder. Jonathan went to the bows. Larsen started to unship the muffled oars, but Jonathan said abruptly, " No, Nils, the motor. I think we need speed more than hush, right now."

The motor started as soon as Larsen swung the handle. Then the boat edged away from the ship's side and swung to face the beach with water bubbling under the thrust of the propeller.

The *Ingeborg* lay a quarter of a mile off shore. It took them less than two minutes to reach the beach. As they came in, Larsen cut the engine and the boat glided forward until its keel made a shushing noise on the sand. Jonathan went over the side. He had his flashlight in one hand and a Walther police automatic in the other. He shone the flashlight full in the face of the man who was waiting.

Mr. Hartbottle had given him photographs to study. The face of the waiting man checked with the face in the photographs, except that it was now unutterably tired and unbearably frightened.

Jonathan smiled. " All aboard, friend," he said quietly. " I may look like Little Lord Fauntleroy but in fact I'm a British agent. Welcome home."

The man called Henry Brand licked his lips. " The dog is dead," he said. His voice was cracked, weary, almost inaudible.

Jonathan answered promptly. " The cat ate its dinner."

Then Brand stumbled forward. He had a haversack made of shoddy canvas. Jonathan took it from him and threw it aboard. Brand's clothes were cheap and baggy, styleless, graceless envelopes dedicated to an ideal of common misery. Jonathan took the scientist in his arms and lifted him over the gunwale of the boat. As he did so he said, " You must let me take you to my tailor when we get home."

Brand smiled weakly. In the boat he sagged down on the duckboards and the weak smile left his face to be replaced by a look of sheer terror. " I was spotted," he said. " I've been on the run for two days. Let's get away from here, for God's sake! A farmer saw me walking towards the beach and I'm sure he will have told the police."

Jonathan nodded. He pushed the boat off and vaulted over the gunwale. The motor burbled. As the bows came round, Jonathan went to stand in the stern. The light in the sky was brighter—very much brighter. Even as he watched, it suddenly increased in intensity and the glare of twin headlamps shone out over the deserted beach.

Jonathan had his automatic rifle in his hands. A small searchlight mounted somewhere on the enemy car flared into action and

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started to sweep sideways. Jonathan's rifle barked. The searchlight went out. Jonathan fired again and missed. He fired a third and then a fourth time, then the car's headlights shattered. The darkness came down like a velvet blanket.

Larsen steered the boat in a long curve to the right. As he did so a machine pistol clattered from the shore and tracer bullets leapt and whined about the place where the boat had been.

Jonathan did not fire again. The men in the car were shooting blind. He had no intention of giving them a target in the muzzle-flash of his rifle. He heard Brand's voice say, "Oh, God!"

Jonathan laughed aloud with excitement. "Don't worry," he shouted. "They couldn't hit a one-winged duck!" Then he put his hand on the scientist's shoulder and said in a changed, softer voice, "If they hit us it'll be a miracle of filthy bad luck. There's a ship near by. We'll be aboard in no time."

Brand said dully, "They'll send patrol-boats after us. I saw two of them in Ribau harbour."

"They'll be lucky to find us," Jonathan commented. Brand said nothing. "If they do," Jonathan added, "they'll find an innocent Danish freighter going about its lawful business. They'll be looking for a British boat—or something romantic like a submarine."

Brand nodded. There was no confidence in the nod. Jonathan frowned. Pity for the man touched his heart. He did not speak again, however, because he knew that only actions could help this exhausted man to retrieve his courage.

The *Ingeborg* slid away into the darkness. She left behind her a mounting pandemonium on the Latvian shore. A second vehicle arrived, flashlights made little wagging beams up and down the beach, and from time to time a shot or a burst of shots indicated that some policeman was letting his imagination or his professional zeal get the better of him.

Jonathan took Professor Brand down to Nils Larsen's cabin. He helped the scientist to undress and to climb into the narrow bunk. He gathered up the shabby clothes from the deck and made them into a bundle. Then he picked up Brand's haversack. "Do you need this? Is there anything important in it?"

"It . . . it contains some notes I made, among other things. They are mostly statistics that I could not carry in my head."

Jonathan glanced down at the haversack. Another thing to be guarded with his life. He nodded. "In that case we had better put it in the safe." He leaned forward, reaching over Brand's body to put his hand on a hook mounted on the bulkhead beside the bunk. "See this?" he said quietly. "Well, turn it and then push against the bulkhead at bunk level."

While he was speaking he carried out his own instructions. A panel of the bulkhead gave, pivoting about its longitudinal axis. He reached into the darkness behind the bulkhead and a dim light came on, revealing a coffin-shaped compartment the same length and

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width as the bunk, floored with a mattress on which a man could lie at full length. Jonathan pushed the haversack through the aperture, turned out the light, and let the panel click back into place.

"That's your funk-hole," he said gently. "If you hear a commotion, or if I bang three times with my heel on the deck above you, you have only to work the catch and roll into it. The panel will shut automatically, but you'll find a second catch inside that will let you open it again. I very much doubt if you'll need to use it, but it's nice to know it's there."

Brand said, "Yes."

Jonathan smiled down at him. "Sleep now, if you can. I'll wake you up if there's any trouble. In four days we'll be in Tilbury. I'm here to make sure that nobody bothers you. Believe it or not, I'm a remarkably efficient bodyguard."

Brand said, "What is your name?"

"I'm called Jonathan."

"Do you work for M.I.5?"

Jonathan chuckled. "Dear me, no. I belong to an organization that's far more esoteric than M.I.5. *They* get their names in the papers!"

Brand smiled slowly. "You make me feel secure, my friend Jonathan. I had forgotten how it felt. I must say I like it. My name is Henry."

"I know," Jonathan said. "But not until we are back in England, it isn't. You must tell nobody your real name—nobody at all!" He grinned. "Since we're to be inseparable for a few days I shall call you David. Try to sleep."

Brand nodded. Jonathan gripped the dirty hand lying outside the blankets for a second and then turned. He picked up the bundle of discarded clothes and left the cabin.

The bundle of clothes, to which Jonathan had tied a spare fire-bar from the *Ingeborg*'s engine-room, went over the side, and sank instantly.

Jonathan turned away from the rail and climbed the companion-way leading to the bridge. Nils Larsen was staring out across the black water. He pointed silently and Jonathan's eyes followed the direction of his pointing finger. There were lights on the horizon, beyond which lay the Latvian port of Ribau. Larsen said, "Patrol-boats."

Jonathan turned to look directly eastwards. There was a dim effulgence in the sky that told him that dawn was less than half an hour away. "Shall we be in a shipping lane before daybreak?"

Larsen nodded. "Yes, but only just."

A Russian patrol-boat picked them up exactly thirty-three minutes later. She came skating across the oily sea, throwing a bow wave like the white wings of a sea-bird. She circled the *Ingeborg* once, then came in close. An officer bellowed at them in Danish, through a megaphone. "Stop! We wish to come aboard."

There were four deck-hands on the *Ingeborg*'s deck. One of them was Jonathan. On the bridge Nils Larsen had a megaphone.

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"For hell!" he bellowed at the Russian boat. "Why should I stop? I'm in a hurry." The answer came back instantly. "You are in Latvian territorial waters. We have the right of search. If you do not stop we shall fire upon you."

Larsen glared at the patrol-boat. She was a wooden ship, built for speed, with a pronounced reversed sheer to her decks, which made her look hump-backed and ugly. He knew the type well, having played numberless games of hide-and-seek with similar vessels during the war. She had been German. Her maximum speed would be three times that of the *Ingeborg*. She mounted machine-guns and a twin-barrelled, multipurpose 40-millimetre gun amidships. Whether she could sink the *Ingeborg* with her gunfire was doubtful, but she could rake the decks, devastate the superstructure and, probably, set the ship on fire.

He shrugged. His hand moved to put the engine-room telegraph to STOP. Bells rang. The *Ingeborg*'s wake changed character, and her bow wave died away.

Jonathan went down the companion-way leading to the captain's cabin three steps at a time. Brand was asleep. Jonathan put his hand on the scientist's shoulder. Convulsively, Brand jerked himself upright and awake. His eyes were staring with terror. When he recognized Jonathan, some of the fear died out of them.

Jonathan worked the secret catch. "In you go," he said with quiet urgency. "We're about to be searched, but they won't find you. You must keep very quiet."

Brand's eyes sickened again. He threw the blankets aside with a panicky movement and rolled sideways into the cache. Jonathan put his hand on the scientist's shoulder. "They will not find you," he said deliberately. "Believe that, keep quiet, and be brave. I shan't be far away."

He let the door of the cache swing into place.

Three minutes later he was back on deck. The Russian patrol-boat had come alongside the *Ingeborg*. The officer and two of the crew were climbing a ladder which had been lowered for them. The two seamen had rifles. The officer, dressed in Russian naval uniform, was a squat, square, middle-aged man, heavily featured but without jowls, with clean, hairy hands, and eyes of a remarkable greeny-grey colour. He had a pistol at his belt. Jonathan watched him. When the man reached the level of the deck Jonathan put out a hand to help him over the side. The Russian shook his arm free irritably. He might have been saying, "I'm a naval officer. I need no help to climb over the side of a lousy little bucket of a coasting steamer!"

Jonathan grinned at him vacantly. Jonathan's face was filthy. His hair hung lankly down over his face. He looked like a fisherman's idiot son. But behind the eyes which he had managed to endow with an expression of mindless good nature, his brain was ticking like a calculator. A typical naval officer. That was bad, since naval officers of all nations tended to be efficient, adaptable men. Yet had the man been a security policeman it would have been worse—much worse.

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Nils Larsen came down from the bridge, his face a picture of disgust.

The Russian said, " Assemble your crew."

Larsen stared at him sullenly for a moment, then nodded, and spoke over his shoulder to Pedersen. Pedersen walked away, shouting.

" Have you any passengers aboard? " the Russian officer demanded.

" Passengers! For hell, this is not a liner! " Disgust grated in Larsen's voice.

The Russian stared at him, then said abruptly, " I must search your ship."

There was a pause. Larsen spat, suddenly and accurately, into the scuppers. He shrugged. " Search, then. But get a stinking move on. We are due in Kiel early tomorrow."

" I shall not waste time," the officer said in his accurate, badly pronounced Danish. " Give me one man to open the doors that are locked, or come yourself. The rest of your crew shall remain on deck."

Larsen turned to Jonathan. " Nilsson," he said, " Take him round."

Jonathan said, " Ja, hr. Kaptajn."

The *Ingeborg*'s crew filtered up on deck. After a few minutes Pedersen counted heads and turned to Larsen. " All on deck."

Larsen looked silently at the Russian officer. The Russian nodded and started to walk up and down the lines of men. He had taken a photograph from his pocket. He looked at it each time he inspected a new face. Jonathan knew what he was looking for—aquiline features, a smoothly intelligent brow, a mole on the right cheek, dark, clever brown eyes under pleasantly mobile eyebrows. Henry Brand; who had, worse luck, a very memorable face.

It did not take the Russian long to tire of staring at the square Nordic faces of the *Ingeborg*'s crew. He turned away and barked a command in Russian at one of his seamen. The man acknowledged the order and took up a position from which he could cover the assembled men with his rifle. Then the Russian officer gestured to the second seaman to follow him and said to Jonathan in Danish. " Lead the way."

Jonathan grinned. " Ja, min herre. Where first? "

" The cabins."

Jonathan led the way. They passed the galley. The Russian stopped Jonathan and ducked back into the grease-plastered kennel in which meals were prepared aboard the *Ingeborg*. When he came out again, he looked straight at Jonathan and said harshly, " Why do you speak such bad Danish? "

It was unexpected. The question took Jonathan by surprise. He nearly made the mistake of failing to show his surprise. But not quite. He blinked at the Russian, his eyes full of doglike anxiety, and said, " I am an Icelander."

" An Icelander? "

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"Ja . . . from Iceland." Jonathan's voice held all the aching bewilderment of Disney's Goofy. In fact, he sounded like Goofy. The Russian seemed satisfied, if not impressed. He nodded. "Lead on."

Jonathan led on. A few seconds later he came to the first of a row of doors in an alleyway. He turned. "This is the Captain's cabin, min herre."

The Russian threw open the door. He walked in, followed by the seaman. Jonathan hovered in the doorway. His thumb was hooked negligently into the pocket of his overalls. On the lintel above the cabin door he had parked a gun. He cocked a wary eye upwards to see that it was still there. It was.

The Russian officer went straight to the bunk. He looked at it. He opened the lockers beside it and peered underneath it. He glanced at the dirty water in the wash-basin, and at the soapy shaving-brush above the basin. He looked down with distaste at a pile of Nils Larsen's discarded underclothes in one corner of the cabin. The cabin looked as if it had been recently occupied. That was how Jonathan had intended that it should look.

"When did the Captain come on deck?" the Russian asked suddenly.

Jonathan blinked. "When?"

"How long ago, you fool?"

Jonathan shrugged. "Twenty minutes, maybe."

The Russian put his hand into the crumpled untidiness of the blankets on the bunk, feeling the warmth. Jonathan brought his hand up to his face and rubbed the stubble on his chin. He waited. The Russian stared at the bunk. He reached across and tapped on the bulkhead beyond it. It sounded hollow. He tapped the bulkhead beside the bunk. It sounded just as hollow. Jonathan knew what he was thinking. He was wondering whether he ought to tear the ship apart. And being daunted by the impossible immensity of the task. A ship has many hiding-places. If bulkheads and panelling are torn down it makes many more. How much time did the Russian have?

Evidently not enough. He turned away. Jonathan breathed deeply and stood aside to let him pass over the threshold. The little party moved on. They came to the next cabin. The Russian said, "Whose is this one?"

Jonathan leered at him. "The Mate's," he said thickly. "Herr Pedersen's."

The Russian threw open the door. Seven hundred and fifty nudes simpered at him from the walls. Jonathan snickered with lascivious appreciation.

And so it went on . . . the cabins, the stores, the engine-room, the foc'sle, and the holds. The Russian officer was a thorough and methodical man.

Two hours later the patrol-boat drew away from the *Ingeborg*'s side. The powerful engines thundered and she leapt forward. It was broad daylight. The sun had come out.

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Jonathan climbed up to the bridge and went to stand beside Nils Larsen, who was staring at the wake of the departing motor boat.

" Seems to me we've earned a schnapps," Jonathan said softly, and the big Dane turned to look at him.

They went into the wheelhouse. Jonathan said suddenly, " He actually tapped the bulkhead."

Nils Larsen shut his eyes and pulled a long face. He poured three glasses of schnapps, whistling through the open door to Pedersen, who came in and picked up a glass. The other two followed his example. They drank. Larsen poured three more drinks Then he said, " What shall happen now? "

Jonathan was looking out through the windows. He could see the patrol-boat still. It was streaking off on a bee-line towards a smudge of smoke on the horizon. He chuckled. " Unless I'm mistaken, our visitors are off to repeat their act for another audience. There must be five ships in the vicinity that could have been anchored off the Latvian coast last night. They probably mean to search the lot."

" And then, mister? " Larsen said. " What will they do after that? "

Jonathan shrugged. " Think again . . . But by the time they've searched five ships—if they do it as thoroughly as they did this one —it'll be nightfall. And we shall be a long way away."

Larsen nodded. A grin spread over his big face. He drank his second glass of schnapps and smacked his lips with a noise like a wet towel being dropped. " For hell! " he said fervently. " It is a good thing those people on the beach never got a light on the *Ingeborg*. My goodness, you shot well, mister! That must be a good rifle of yours."

" I love it," Jonathan said, " like my mother."

Throughout the day the *Ingeborg* steamed at eleven knots towards the Kiel Canal. Several times Russian patrol-boats came near, but they sheered off when they had read the name on her counter. Evidently the *Ingeborg* had a tick beside her name on some list or other. Twice during the day aircraft flew low over the ship. They were twin-engined naval reconnaissance planes and they carried rockets beneath their wings.

" If they only knew," Jonathan said when he saw the first of the planes. " Ker-whump! "

Larsen shuddered. The *Ingeborg* was his ship.

Down below, Henry Brand slept like a corpse. At six o'clock in the evening he woke up. Jonathan was sitting beside his bunk. Henry Brand opened his eyes, smiled, and said quietly, " What are you reading? "

Jonathan looked up slowly with surprise in his face. He had known that Professor Brand's courage would come back but had not expected to see it so soon. He smiled in return. " It's a book about eating," he said. " The autobiography of an educated belly . . . What now? You must be ready to do a bit of eating, yourself."

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" I think I'll have a shave. Then I would like something to eat."

" Right. I'll go to the galley and cook you up something myself. Everybody in this ship lives on raw fish, like good little Danes. Would eggs and bacon do? "

" Eggs and bacon would be wonderful."

Jonathan got to his feet. He nodded at the wash-basin. " You'll find shaving things over there, David. Help yourself."

At seven o'clock, Pedersen knocked on the door of the cabin. Jonathan and Henry Brand were playing cards. Jonathan said, " Hullo? "

In Danish, Pedersen's voice answered urgently, " The patrol-boat. It's back. They want to come aboard again."

When Jonathan reached the deck the Russian boat was still standing off the *Ingeborg*. He was in time to hear Nils Larsen's voice, bellowing through a megaphone. " Why should I let you aboard? We are no longer in territorial waters, for hell! You have searched me once. What more do you want? "

Back came the answer, " We wish to search you again. If you do not stop we shall fire."

Larsen shouted, " Go to hell! "

There was a little daylight left. Jonathan stared across the water at the Russian boat. It had more men aboard this time, some of whom were in civilian clothes. Experts. Security policemen. Men who would not be content with tapping walls. He raced for the bridge.

The twin barrels of the 40-millimetre gun on the Russian boat yapped like monstrous terriers. Six shells tore past the *Ingeborg*'s bridgeworks. One of them hit a derrick and exploded with a vicious thud and whining splinters.

Jonathan shouted at Larsen, " Let them come alongside." Then he raced below again.

As he ran he heard the big Dane's voice, filled with quite genuine fury and simulated panic, shouting, " Stop firing! Stop firing! You can come aboard if you must! "

By the time the *Ingeborg* had lost way and the Russian boat had manœuvred herself alongside, Jonathan was back on deck again. He looked quickly over the side of the *Ingeborg* at the deck of the patrol-boat fifteen feet below. The officer who had searched them that morning was reaching for a ladder that Pedersen had just thrown down. Behind him there was a small queue—three blank-featured men in civilian clothes and four armed seamen.

Jonathan smiled with grim happiness. From where she lay, the patrol-boat's guns could not bear on the *Ingeborg*. She was a sitting duck. He bent down. When he straightened again he had a five-gallon drum of petrol in his hands. He rested it for an instant on the bulwarks and reached downwards for a cleaver. With two strokes of the cleaver he cut a great slice of metal out of the side of the drum. Then he let it fall on to the deck of the boat below.

Shouts of fury reached his ears. A machine-gun started to

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stammer futilely. Jonathan pulled the pin out of a hand-grenade. He lobbed it over the side, turned, and dived for cover behind a ventilator.

The grenade's explosion was drowned in a great crackling roar. Flame leapt up the *Ingeborg*'s side. Jonathan tore up the companion-way towards the bridge. "Get going!" he shouted. "Give her the gun, for God's sake!"

Nils Larsen was grinning all over his face. He had already pushed the lever of the engine-room telegraph to FULL AHEAD.

The *Ingeborg* gathered way, turning hard to port away from the blazing patrol-boat as she did so. Someone was still firing a machine-gun from the deck of the Russian boat, but he soon stopped. She was afire from stem to stern. Jonathan watched and saw figures silhouetted against the blaze as they dived into the water. He looked down at the *Ingeborg*'s deck and saw that Pedersen and a handful of deckies were subduing the small fires which had been started here and there aboard the bigger ship. He breathed out deeply. From behind him, Larsen's voice said, "O.K., mister?"

Jonathan said, "O.K. It was chancy, but it worked."

"The fire will bring other patrol-boats like flies to a sausage."

"I know. We've got to be out of the way before they arrive. It's getting dark fast. We'll make it."

Larsen said, "Maybe we should change course. I told them this morning we were bound for Kiel."

"Yes." Jonathan's voice was thoughtful now. "We'd better make for Copenhagen, Nils," he said slowly. "They know now that this ship has Mr. X aboard. He and I had better get off it as soon as we can."

Larsen gave orders to the helmsman. Then he said, "Should we drink a little more schnapps, do you think?"

Jonathan said, "Yes, please."

Throughout the night the *Ingeborg* ploughed steadily onwards towards Copenhagen. From time to time she changed course in order to avoid other shipping which might or might not be hostile. Once during the night an aircraft flew low overhead.

At daybreak she was lying thirty miles south of the Danish island of Bornholm. After a quick breakfast Jonathan went up to the bridge. He scanned the horizon with Nils Larsen's powerful binoculars. There were four other ships in sight. With relief Jonathan identified them all as merchantmen. He had been half-expecting to see a Russian destroyer on their tail. He gave the glasses back to Larsen. "How long to Copenhagen, Nils?"

Larsen said, "Six hours. Seven, maybe."

Jonathan nodded. Seven hours. Not a long time, yet he wished it could have been less. He went down to Henry Brand's cabin and found the scientist memorizing a sheaf of notes he had taken from his haversack. Having slept for nearly twenty hours out of the past twenty-four and having eaten four solid meals, Brand was a changed

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man. He looked up as Jonathan entered. His brown eyes were keen, holding none of the fear that had haunted them earlier. Jonathan smiled with pleasure as he realized that his companion was no longer a passenger to be spoon-fed and cosseted, but a partner, now, in a shared adventure. "Copenhagen in six or seven hours," he said.

Brand nodded. "What then?"

"Then we fly home," Jonathan said.

Brand looked at him quizzically. "Is it going to be as easy as that?"

A feeling in Jonathan's bones was telling him no. He wondered if Brand had a similar feeling. He shrugged and said, "Perhaps not. Who knows?"

Something in his face must have amused the scientist because Brand laughed suddenly. "Never in my life have I met a man so in love with his profession," he said. "I do believe you're hoping for more trouble, Jonathan."

Jonathan grinned. "I enjoy myself," he admitted. "But I'm not hoping for trouble. I find it comes without hoping." Presently he added, "You can come on deck if you want to, you know."

Brand looked down at the notes in his lap. "I'd better concentrate on these for a couple of hours. It might be useful to have them memorized. I'll come on deck later, if you think it wise."

"You can duck below if anyone shows any interest in us," Jonathan said. "There's no risk. Be seeing you."

In a way Jonathan was wrong about the risk. Henry Brand had been on deck for precisely half an hour when the torpedo struck.

A sheet of flame flashed up the *Ingeborg*'s side. Black smoke billowed. The decks heaved like the back of a startled horse and men found themselves lying feet away from where they had been before the explosion. With a noise like the snapping of a mammoth's bones the *Ingeborg* broke in two. She had not been built to resist the blast of a torpedo. Her fore-end sank instantly. Her after-end lingered for a few minutes above the surface of the sea.

Jonathan hauled himself to his feet. The wind had been knocked out of him and he was dragging air into his lungs in long, wheezing gasps. When he had partially recovered his breath he looked up to see Henry Brand on his knees on the deck a few feet away.

"Are you hurt?"

Brand shook his head. "Only . . . only winded." The words came painfully. Jonathan knew how he felt.

They scrambled down the companion-way from the bridge, cocked up at a crazy angle, to the main deck below. Nils Larsen and a handful of seamen were trying to launch a boat. When Jonathan approached, Larsen said, "No good. No time. We'll have to swim for it, mister."

Jonathan turned to Brand. "Can you swim, David?"

"Yes. Quite well."

They went over the side hand in hand to avoid being separated

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in the water. The water was cold. It was October. When they had swum for fifty yards, what remained of the *Ingeborg* slid beneath the surface. The sea made a greedy, gobbling noise as it swallowed the little ship. A cloud of steam remained, but it lingered only for an instant.

Jonathan looked back at the wreckage and at the heads bobbing in the water. Too few heads: some of the crew had died. He thought of Nils Larsen, and was sorry that his ship had gone down. But there were other ships. And the fact that the *Ingeborg* had not gone down with Henry Brand aboard was the thing that mattered.

Brand was hanging on to a piece of wreckage. Jonathan took hold beside him. For a few minutes they floated side by side in silence. Then Brand said, "Was it a submarine?"

"Must have been."

"I didn't see a periscope."

"Nowadays they don't need a periscope, I'm told," Jonathan said grimly. "They write out the address on a piece of paper and give it to the torpedo to read."

Brand laughed bitterly. "Life is getting altogether too scientific, isn't it?"

"So long as you don't take offence, I'll agree with you," Jonathan said. He was looking across the water. A cargo-boat was coming towards them. It was less than a mile away. "How do you feel?"

"Chilly . . . And my eyes are full of oil. Otherwise all right."

"We'll be picked up in no time," Jonathan said.

"Can you see a ship?"

"Yes."

"You don't look very pleased."

"Until I've made quite sure she's not a Russian," Jonathan said bitterly, "I'm holding my breath."

She was not a Russian, but a Swede bound for Malmö with a cargo of timber from Helsinki in Finland. Just before they were picked up, Jonathan said, "Say nothing, David. Let me do the talking. Pretend to be shocked."

Brand's teeth were chattering. "That shouldn't be difficult," he said. Then, while a boat from the Swedish ship was pulling towards them, he asked, "Do you think we'll ever get back to England alive?"

Jonathan turned to face him. The scientist's eyes had a sick look in them again. Jonathan thought he knew why. Just when things had been going well, when it had seemed that they had shown a clean pair of heels, a torpedo had come out of the sea's depths to emphasize the lengths to which their enemies would go in order to destroy a man who possessed their secrets. The enmity of an entire vast nation was a heavy burden for a spirit to bear.

Jonathan said, "Yes." His voice was flat and downright. "We'll get back to England, David. And when we do, you'll be safe, don't forget. Once you've spilled the beans to our experts there will be no further point in killing you. Try to remember that, when the odds seem to be too heavily against us."

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Brand nodded. His eyes were heavy. "I'll try," he said painfully. "Without you I should be lost, Jonathan, so don't leave me."

Jonathan thought of the little square room with padded walls; of a deep voice and a firm handshake. "I won't leave you," he said quietly. "We might as well be Siamese twins, my friend."

Once on board the Swedish ship they were wrapped in blankets and taken below decks. They were given hot coffee and rum, and clean clothes were found for them. Then Henry Brand collapsed. He did it so wholeheartedly that, for a moment, Jonathan wondered if it were genuine, but the scientist found a chance to wink at him, and he was reassured.

The Swedish crew were full of questions. Jonathan took it upon himself to answer the first of them, forestalling Nils Larsen and saying thickly in his terrible Danish, "It was a mine. I saw it in the sea a second before we struck. It was a round thing with horns upon it. That was a mine for sure, was it not?"

Larsen stared at Jonathan. Then, slowly, he nodded. "Ja . . . ja, it must have been a mine," he agreed. "Why the hell can they not sweep the seas clean? It is a disgrace! My God, it is a disgrace!"

The Swedish captain and his officers muttered in agreement. In the background, having withdrawn from the company of his betters, Jonathan relaxed a little. A torpedo would have been greater news even than a mine. A torpedo would have been an international incident. Those involved in international incidents tend to find themselves with their pictures in the newspapers. The thought had been making him sweat.

In the early evening the Swedish ship reached Copenhagen, having gone out of her way to land the *Ingeborg*'s survivors.

Jonathan was on deck when she docked in the Frihavnen. He looked down at the quay, crowded with officials, reporters, and policemen. Then he looked into the middle distance where cars and ambulances were waiting. His brain was working at high pressure because he knew without doubt that somewhere on the quay or near it, there would be enemy eyes watching. There might even be enemy guns waiting. It was futile to hope that they would have taken Brand's death for granted.

Under his breath, he cursed Marconi for having invented radio. How much easier it would have been if they could have landed unobtrusively, without a reception committee, and in darkness.

But that was impossible. Grimly, Jonathan numbered his remaining assets. The enemy could not know whether Brand had or had not gone down with the *Ingeborg*. It was hardly likely that they would know him by sight—but they would have photographs, and Brand was an easily recognizable man. They could not know that he, Jonathan, would be in attendance and on guard. That was about all. It was up to him to make the best of it. The only likelihood upon which he thought he could rely was that they would not act until they were sure. He hoped it would be possible to keep them in a state of uncertainty until the crucial moment was past.

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Nils Larsen was the first of the *Ingeborg*'s crew to set foot in Denmark. He was followed by Jonathan, who was followed in turn by two seamen carrying Henry Brand on a stretcher. Brand was swathed in blankets so that only the top of his head was visible.

When the reporters swarmed to the attack Nils Larsen took the impact of their curiosity. Yes, the explosion had cut the ship clean in two. Yes, it had been a mine. The mate, Aage Pedersen, was dead and three other members of his crew had drowned. Yes, it was his ship. Yes, he hoped to buy another with the compensation. Yes, he was glad to be back in Copenhagen—For hell! Did they think he would be sorry? No, he was not a Copenhagener; he came from Aalborg. And so on.

Jonathan, walking behind the stretcher, made his way slowly up the quay towards the ambulances. When spectators approached too closely he put the forefinger of his left hand to his lips and nodded at the stretcher. His right hand was closed tightly round the butt of the gun in his pocket. The palm was sticky with perspiration.

They reached the ambulances. Jonathan led the stretcher-bearers past the first one. He did this automatically, just as, when his life was threatened, he never took the first taxi to offer itself. The driver of the second ambulance had the doors open. He jerked his thumb at the stretcher. "Bad?"

Jonathan nodded. "Yes, he collapsed when they got him out of the water."

A man came out of the crowd and walked towards the stretcher. Jonathan stood in his way. The man looked down at the stretcher and bent sideways to get a better view of the head half protruding from the blankets. Jonathan's finger flexed on the trigger of his pistol. The man straightened up and walked away. Jonathan watched him through half-closed eyes.

The ambulance driver and his mate had taken the stretcher from the seamen who had been carrying it. They slid it into the back of the ambulance with the gentle sureness of long practice. Jonathan said crisply, "Right. Let's get going. There aren't any more stretcher cases." He climbed into the ambulance and the doors shut behind him.

It was while the ambulance was careering past the Hotel d'Angleterre in Kongens Nytorv that Jonathan, watching through the windows at the back, became sure that they were being followed. Danish ambulances travel fast. They mount a hand-operated siren whose ear-splitting grunt-and-wail keeps Copenhageners awake at nights. No driver in his senses attempts to keep up with an ambulance in the Danish capital unless he has a very good reason.

There was a black saloon car behind them now that was keeping up.

Jonathan watched the car for a few minutes longer. Then he went to sit on the bench running along one side of the ambulance. For a moment he wondered whether to put a shot through the wind-

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screen of the following car, but decided against it. Too drastic. Too much of a brouhaha. Too many policemen.

Once they got to the hospital, he realized, it would be nearly impossible not to surrender Brand, however briefly, to the hospital authorities. The idea did not attract him. Things could happen in hospitals.

Too many people had access to the wards. By claiming to be a relative, or a priest, or a doctor, a man might get in to see any patient. Then again, the enemy might have people on the staff of the hospital; it was a big institution.

He stood up and went back to the windows. The black car was still there. He put out his hand to touch Brand on the foot. " Up you get, David. We may want to get out in a hurry." Brand threw aside the blankets and sat up.

Soon the ambulance came to the Raadhus-Plads, Copenhagen's Town Hall Square. A policeman had heard the siren and was holding the traffic against the lights. As they passed him, Jonathan saw the policeman step into the path of the black car with his hand raised. Brave man. The car slowed and swerved.

Before it could accelerate again cross-traffic had started to move and it was baulked.

Jonathan forced himself to wait. If they left the ambulance too soon they would sacrifice their advantage. If they waited too long the black car would have made up for lost time. He waited until they had covered five hundred yards, then tapped on the panel behind the driver's seat. It opened and the driver's mate said, " Is something wrong? "

Jonathan said, " Stop."

" Why? Is there . . . ? "

" Don't argue! Stop! "

As the ambulance slowed, Jonathan flung open the doors. Before it had fully stopped he and Brand were in the street and running like hares.

Passers-by stopped to stare. The shouts of the ambulance men rang out behind them. Jonathan panted, " Take no notice, David. Just run."

A few seconds later Jonathan saw the black car again. It was a hundred and fifty yards away, weaving in and out of the traffic like an eel through stems of seaweed. Jonathan said, " Walk."

They walked, trying to pretend to be quite ordinary Danish citizens on their way to take a beer together. It did not work. They had made themselves noticeable. People were still staring curiously. Jonathan looked back. The black car was at the kerbside fifty yards away. Three men were getting out. He said, " Run, David. As fast as you can."

Fifty yards further on Jonathan turned into the doorway of a hotel. He led Brand straight through the lobby, through a service door, past a protesting under-manager, through the kitchens, and out into the street behind. In the street he paused for a second. Brand was exhausted, his breath coming in great, pumping gasps.

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Jonathan said, " Come on, pal. We're not far from home. One last effort."

" How . . . how far? "

" Four hundred yards."

They ran on. They turned right and right again in narrow streets and came out on a broader one. Eventually they reached an apartment house built over a large flower shop. The indicator showed that the elevator was at the seventh floor.

Jonathan started up the stairs two at a time. Halfway up the first flight Brand stumbled and fell. Jonathan picked him up bodily in a fireman's lift and went on up—but not taking two stairs at a time any more.

On the third floor he stopped outside an apartment and rang the bell. No answer.

Jonathan said savage things under his breath. He took a curiously shaped key from his pocket and worked on the lock.

The door yielded.

Jonathan pushed Brand through the door, entered himself, turned, slammed the door shut, and shot the bolt. Then he listened, his ear pressed to the door. Footsteps came up the stairs. They might have been legitimate footsteps. Yet again, they might not.

Presently he turned away from the door. Brand was sitting in a low chair, holding his head in his hands. Jonathan said, " Sorry to make you run, David, but they were yapping at our heels."

Brand looked up. " Are they still? "

" I don't know. They may have followed us to the entrance of this block. Even if they have, they still don't know which apartment we're in and there are over seventy of them."

" Does that mean we're safe? "

" Relatively."

" Whose is the apartment? " Brand asked. " Yours? "

Jonathan smiled. " More or less. It belongs to a girl called Anna Jacobsen—a friend of mine—one of us, as they say."

Somebody knocked on the front door. Then rang the bell. Jonathan put his fingers gently over Brand's lips. Like a long, lean cat he walked towards the door with his pistol in his hand. He waited. Footsteps receded outside the door. Jonathan still waited. No sound. He relaxed.

He crossed the room quietly to a table with a telephone on it and lifted the receiver, dialling a number with his gun hand. When a voice answered, Jonathan said softly, " Anna? "

" Yes? "

" We've gone to ground in your flat. The wolves are at the door. Keep your eyes open when you come home."

" Shall I come now? " the girl's voice asked.

" Yes, there are things I want you to do."

Jonathan put down the receiver. He faced Henry Brand. " You can relax now," he said.

" I think we're all right. They may be outside, but even if they

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are they can't do much more than spin their prayer-wheels and pray for guidance."

Half an hour later Anna Jacobsen came home. She was a blonde; a big girl with a gentle face and quiet manners. Her face was tanned and unobtrusively made up; her body was evidently a splendid instrument because she moved beautifully.

Jonathan said, "Well? Did we ditch 'em?"

She answered him in slow, careful English, sorrowfully, "No, Jonathan. The street outside has three men and there are two at the back as well."

Jonathan said nothing. He looked down at his feet for a moment. Then he looked up. He took Anna by the shoulders and kissed her. "First for five days," he said, and she smiled at him.

"Meet David," Jonathan said. "David, meet Anna. She's a very dangerous female. She wears a gun in her stocking-top and goes rooty-toot-toot at the drop of a hat."

Anna chuckled. "He's a fool, David. Welcome to Copenhagen."

Nobody came to the flat during the night. Anna cooked dinner. Afterwards Henry Brand went to sleep in Anna's bed. Jonathan and Anna talked until midnight and then took turns to stay on guard, sleeping on the couch in the living-room during their off-duty periods.

After breakfast Jonathan went downstairs to make a reconnaissance. When he returned he said, "They're still there. Three at the front and two at the back. They'll have a car tucked away somewhere."

Brand said, "We can't stay here for ever."

"We can stay here for days if need be," Jonathan said.

At that moment the telephone rang. Anna answered. When she turned away from the instrument she was smiling. "It's arrived," she said. "That was Kastrup."

Brand said, "What's arrived?"

"Our private aeroplane," Jonathan said. "An R.A.F. Canberra. We're V.I.P's, you and I." Jonathan smiled at Brand and added, "I know . . . We've got to get out of here alive before the plane's any good to us. We will."

Ten minutes later Anna left the flat. She was away for two hours. When she came back she was carrying several packages. Jonathan opened one of them and took out two large false beards of the kind that hooks over the ears.

Brand looked at the beards with astonished incredulity.

"You don't imagine for an instant that anybody's going to be deceived by those, my dear Jonathan!"

Jonathan grinned at him.

"Wait," he said. "Put your trust in Jonathan, for he is not nearly as nutty as he looks."

In the other packages were changes of outer clothing for Brand and Jonathan and, as well, a canvas jerkin that was unusually heavy. It took them ten minutes to dress. Anna was making coffee.

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Presently she returned to the living-room with steaming cups in her hands and said, " It's about time. They should be here by now."

Jonathan went to the window. Without showing himself, he looked down into the street below. He beckoned to Brand, and he was smiling with wicked delight.

Henry Brand looked through the window at the street. He saw two men wearing false beards walking along the pavement towards the entrance of the apartment block.

Jonathan said, " How many did you manage to recruit, Anna? "

" Thirty," she said. " Most of them are students—friends of my brother—but I got some older ones as well."

Jonathan turned to Brand.

" Do you understand, David? Thirty of them, all bearded. We'll give them a few minutes to mill about downstairs and then we'll join the fun. Can you face it? "

Henry Brand smiled. " Yes," he said. " I can face it. You have a mind like a schoolboy."

Jonathan nodded. " Which is more than any man in the opposition has," he said. " They're stereotyped. They don't use their imaginations. You can beat them all the time. We'll make it all right, pal. Believe me."

They drank their coffee. Jonathan took out his Walther and checked the magazine. He cocked the action again and put the pistol in his raincoat pocket.

" Got your gun, David? "

Brand nodded. Anna picked up her bag. She opened it and took out a Browning automatic. She cocked it with an adroit flick of her long fingers.

Brand watched her. She was a new kind of woman in his experience. She smiled at him. She might have been going to the pictures.

The entrance hall of the apartment block was alive with bearded men. So was the street outside. They wandered about aimlessly, walking into the flower shop, walking out again, walking up the street, round to the back of the building, through the building, and

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"MY DEAR FELLOW, A *THOUSAND* CONGRATULATIONS!"

"THANKS AWF'LY! WE BOTH PWOPOSED LAST WEEK, YOU KNOW, AND SHE ACCEPTED — A — *HIM*!"

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out into the street again. Where there were, in fact, thirty, there seemed to be a hundred.

Wearing his beard, Jonathan went out into the street. He saw a man standing against a shop-front across the road. He saw a second one a few yards away. He could not spot the third. The faces of the two he did see were suffused with anger. Suddenly one of them snatched the beard off the face of a student who passed close by him.

The student looked at him steadily, stooped, picked up the beard, fitted the wires over his ears, and walked on.

Jonathan felt Henry Brand touch him from behind. He did not look round.

A crowd had gathered. Two policemen were hurrying towards the apartment house. In the doorway Anna Jacobsen lit a cigarette. The beards started to drift away. Jonathan and Brand drifted with them.

The watchers followed, but at the end of the street the beards split up; some went one way, some another. The watchers split up. The beards split again. There were too many beards and too few watchers.

When they were a quarter of a mile from the apartment house, Jonathan pushed Brand into the doorway of a restaurant. " Ditch the face hair, David," he whispered.

He took Brand's beard and his own, rolled them together, and stuffed them behind the restaurant door which was locked in the open position. Then he stepped out into the street.

Two beards were walking near by, watched by several curious children. Otherwise, everything was completely normal.

Jonathan's sixth sense told him that they had made the grade. He went back to Brand in the doorway. " All clear. On you go—through the restaurant. There should be a car waiting in the yard at the back. Anna fixed it with the proprietor."

The car was there, an inconspicuous Hansa saloon. Jonathan patted it fondly with the palm of his hand. Then he got in and started the engine.

" Now for Kastrup airport," he said. " I only hope the R.A.F. have some gin on board."

It took them half an hour to drive to Kastrup, which lies at the end of a peninsula south of Copenhagen. There was a car park outside the airport buildings. Jonathan slammed the Hansa into a gap with exquisite precision. He switched off, leaving the keys dangling, and retrieved his gun from the seat beside him. He was happy. So was Henry Brand.

" All set, David? "

" All set, Jonathan."

They got out of the car and strolled across the car park towards the glass doors of the departure section. Jonathan led the way. He pushed open a door and held it for the scientist. With the other hand, as Brand entered, Jonathan groped in his inside pocket for his passport.

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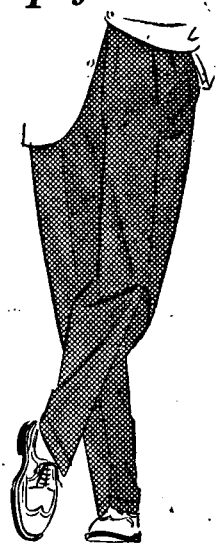

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The shot sounded as he closed his fingers over the passport's shiny surface.

It echoed against the concrete walls of the building. It echoed in Jonathan's ears like unexpected thunder on a summer's day. All movement stopped. Travellers, customs officers, and airline officials stared at one another.

Jonathan spotted a man with a smoking gun in his hand. He shot him through the leg as the man turned to make a dash for the doors. A policeman and one of the onlookers jumped on the killer and took away his pistol.

Henry Brand was on his knees.

As Jonathan turned, Brand fell forwards. His breathing made a loud, shocking noise in the silence.

A man hastened out of the crowd. Jonathan looked at him.

"I am a doctor," the man said. "I might be able to help."

He knelt beside Brand. His hand went out to pull aside the injured man's clothing.

In Jonathan's brain a question was set up as if in neon lighting.

I AM A DOCTOR.

Why in English? *Why, in Denmark, should the man have spoken English?*

Jonathan raised his gun high and brought it down hard on the doctor's head.

The man fell forwards as if he had been pole-axed. A long thin

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knife slid from between his limp fingers. Not a doctor. A surgeon, perhaps, or a butcher. But not a doctor.

In the Canberra Jonathan took off Henry Brand's coat. He unzipped the canvas jerkin beneath and helped the scientist out of it. When he threw the jerkin aside it fell with a metallic noise. He pulled Brand's shirt to one side. There was a great red patch of bruised flesh over the heart.

Brand looked down at his chest. "Better than a damn big hole!"

Jonathan nodded.

"I'm sorry, David. If I had had my wits about me I should have known that they would be watching the airport. I can't blame myself enough."

Brand looked up. "Don't blame yourself," he said. "You gave me the bullet-proof jerkin. You dropped the man who shot at me. I doubt if another man on earth would have been quick enough to keep the second man's knife out of my throat. You owe me no apologies."

Jonathan smiled slowly. "At least we made it."

One of the pilots came through from the forward compartment. "We shall be over England in three-quarters of an hour," he said. "And you should be at your destination half an hour after that. We're landing on an airfield near by."

Jonathan said, "Thank you."

The pilot grinned.

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" By the way," he added. " We were given some things for you before we took off. Here they are."

Brand and Jonathan took the small cedarwood boxes from the pilot's hand.

In each there was a note, unsigned. In each case it said the same thing: *Well done!*

And in each box there was a large, torpedo-shaped cigar.

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PRIZE-WINNERS OF CROSSWORD NO. 11

We are pleased to announce the three winners of Argosy's eleventh Prize Crossword Competition:—

Miss P. M. Higgs, Cross o' Cliff Hill, Lincoln.

Miss P. J. Horsley, Downing Road, Sheffield 8.

John C. Lindsay Esq., Derrin Road, Enniskillen, N. Ireland.

These readers, who sent in the first correct solutions to be checked on the closing date, each receive a one-guinea book token.

SOLUTION

Across. 1, *Simpleton.* 6, *Viola.* 9, *Diderot.* 10, *Archaic.* 11, *Nelson.* 12, *Coronets.* 14, *Ivan.* 15, *Administer.* 18, *Vampire bat.* 19, *Hail.* 21, *Strength.* 23, *Lesser.* 26, *Braemar.* 27, *Too good.* 28, *Eaten.* 29, *Slaughter.*

Down. 1, *Sedan.* 2, *Model farm.* 3, *Lure on.* 4, *Tots.* 5, *Neapolitan.* 6, *Victoria.* 7, *Orate.* 8, *Ancestral.* 13, *Adventures.* 14, *Invisible.* 16, *Transport.* 17, *Cinnamon.* 20, *Belong.* 22, *Roast.* 24, *Rider.* 25, *Etna.*

PRIZE CROSSWORD NO. 14

Prize Crossword No. 14 will be found on page 144. For rules of entry, please see page 93.

Readers will note on page 93 that we are now offering *five* one-guinea book tokens each month as prizes in our Crossword Competition.

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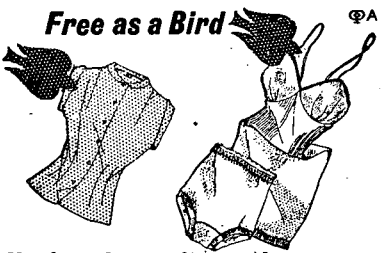

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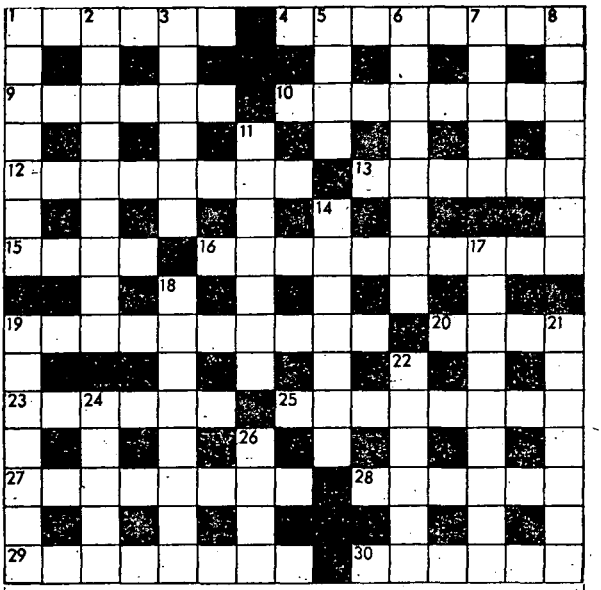
PRIZE CROSS WORD

No. 14

★

Rules of Entry on Page 93

★



BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE

Name .....

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CUT ALONG THE LINE

CLUES

Across

1 It sounds as though Scottish solicitors write to this young bird (6).

4 Ill-tempered old weapon (5-3).

9 Colour of cowardice (6).

10 Give up ; though this carries little weight at the end (8).

12 A funereal sort of telephone conversation ? (4, 4).

13 The result of aiming too *high* ? (6).

15 Yearn *in extenso*, perhaps (4).

16 After a P.O.W. camp, the little creature becomes a cave-dweller (10).

19 I bent canes for a Lenten practice (10).

20 Mixed vegetables make monkeys (4).

23 Change a tea era to fizzy drink ? (6).

25 The unit's inside a reed and they're joined again (8).

27 A sailor, a saint, and a stratagem—hard to solve (8).

28 *Metaphorical repository* of hearts or laughter (6).

29 Two fools go in for homicide (8).

30 He was an honourable man, said Antony (6).

Down

1 This mineral may be worth looking into (7).

2 Will these playing-fields keep your cuffs tidy ? (4-5).

3 A brave Beethoven symphony (6).

5 Cotton-spinners' dance? (4).

6 Check the boy attendant and you'll cause delay (8).

7 Judicial seat (5).

8 Swelter : you certainly will if you cut up rough (7).

11 Compliment more levelly (7).

14 We lack Ben to do the dirty work (7).

17 I need the doctor and I won't wait (9).

18 You and the sapper among the Ancient Britons are sights (8).

19 Alphabetically, it's the first of the forty-eight (7).

21 " May there be no —— of farewell when I embark " (Tennyson) (7).

22 The distinguished mathematician loses his head and goes fishing (6).

24 " The raptures and —— of vice " (Swinburne) (5).

26 I sat, in confusion, on an Italian wine (4).

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